IDYLLS OF THE SEA

F·T·BULLEN·

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AND

Other Marine Sketches

BY

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FIRST MATE

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY J. ST. LOE STRACHEY

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TO

MY DEAR WIFE

THIS LITTLE BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED

Most of these sketches are, by the courtesy of the proprietors, reprinted from the *Spectator*; the others have appeared in various magazines —the *Cornhill*, *Good Words*, *Sunday Magazine*, *Chambers's Journal*, *Country Life*, *National Review*, and *Pall Mall Gazette*. To the proprietors of all these journals my hearty thanks for their kind permission to republish are hereby offered.

FRANK T. BULLEN.

PREFACE

In these little sketches of a few out of the innumerable multitude of ways in which the sea has spoken to me during my long acquaintance with it, I have tried with 'prentice hand to reproduce for shore-dwellers some of the things it has told me. If I were to stop and consider what other men, freeholders upon the upper slopes of the literary Olympus, have done in the same direction, I should not dare to put forth this little book.

Let my plea be that I have not seen with their eyes nor heard with their ears, but with mine own. This may have some weight with my judges—those who will buy the wares I have to sell.

FRANK T. BULLEN.

Feb. 1899.

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Bullen's work in literature requires no introduction. If it ever did, it has received one so complete from Mr. Kipling, that not another word is needed. Mr. Kipling, in phrases as happy as they are generous, has exactly described the character of Mr. Bullen's writings. After that, to commend him to the public is superfluous. However, in spite of this, Mr. Bullen has asked me to write a few words to put in the front of his book, and I obey. If my introduction does no good, it will at least do no harm, and I shall at any rate have the pleasure of being in very good company. His whales and sharks and other monsters of the deep are creatures with whom one is proud to be associated.

These Idylls—little pictures—strike me as some of the most vivid things ever written about the sea. I take it that only a man who has used the sea as a common sailor, and before the mast, really

knows it in all its humours,—has heard all those multitudinous voices that echo along the vast waste spaces of the deep. The officer is either too busy with his responsibilities of command, or else is off duty and so not at close quarters with the winds and waves. As a rule the sailor,—the man who heaves the lead, stands at the wheel, sits in the crow's nest for long hours together, and does the more wearisome and leisurely duties of the ship, is not a person of sufficient imagination and education to record the impressions that come to those who do battle with "a remote and unhearing Ocean." In Mr. Bullen, perhaps for the first time, we have a man who has been a fo'c's'le hand and yet has the power, first to realise in a literary shape, and then to set down, the wonders of the flood. It was a most happy combination that for once the man who saw the tropic dawn from the crow's nest of a whaler should be able to communicate the full magic of the scene.

It is not conventionally that I have called Mr. Bullen's work "vivid." It is of writing such as his that we can say, and say truly:

> I watch no longer—I myself am there.

He transports us to the very place he describes—does not merely hand us a stereoscopic glass in which to observe a well-defined photograph.

One other quality has always struck me in Mr. Bullen's work. In spite of the fact that he knows so much science, and makes so keen and convincing a use of this knowledge, there is always an air of mystery and enchantment about his writing. De Quincey's brother told De Quincey that all his arguments against the supernatural were perfectly sound here in England, but that they did not hold "to the suth'ard of the line." In the Southern Seas were still to be found realms where pure reason was not supreme. But Mr. Bullen's experiences and Idylls are "to the suth'ard of the line." He deals as a rule with that region of romance, and hence it is, I suppose, that a sense of something strange and fateful, and so fascinating, haunts his pictures of the sea.

But I am doing the readers of this book a very ill turn in keeping them waiting at the door. Let them be assured that there is matter well worth their marking within, and that if they are capable of taking pleasure in the sea and its secrets, they cannot fail of entertainment here.

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY.

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IDYLLS OF THE SEA

I

THE PASSING OF PETER

For six weeks we had simmered in unwinking sunblaze by day, and by night had stared with ever-fresh wonder at the blue-black immensity above, bejewelled with stars as the sand on the sea-shore for multitude. Among the glorious host of heaven the dazzling moon sailed on her stately way, the radiant splendour of her rays almost unbearable in their penetrating power. Beneath us the waveless ocean lay like another sky, its levelled surface unruffled by the faintest zephyr. On moonless nights it was often hard to divest oneself of the idea that we were floating in mid-air, so little difference was there between below and above. Our passage, already over long, seemed to have ended here, a thousand miles from land, and far out of the track of other ships. For some time this wondrous restfulness of all the elements fell upon our souls like the soothing touch of a mother's hand upon the fevered head of her child. In the night watches

voices were hushed, and whispered converse came gently from lips unaccustomed to such topics, upon subjects exalted and solemn. Even during the day, while engaged in severe toil—for our careful captain was utilising this unwelcome opportunity in a general refit—it seemed as if all hands were under a deep impression of gravity, as though conscious of contact with the eternities. But this feeling of awe, which was almost involuntary worship, gradually gave place as the days passed in changeless procession to an increasing sense of indefinite fear. Each man looked askance at his fellow's face, fearfully seeking sight of that shadow he felt upon his own. One unspoken question trembled on every lip, one overmastering idea blended with and tinctured all others. A change, unusual as unwholesome, came over the bright blue of the sea. No longer did it reflect, as in a limpid mirror, the splendour of the sun, the sweet silvery glow of the moon, or the coruscating clusters of countless stars. Like the ashen-grey hue that bedims the countenance of the dying, a filmy greasy skin appeared to overspread the recent loveliness of the ocean's surface. The sea was sick, stagnant, and foul. From its turbid waters arose a miasmatic vapour like a breath of decay, which clung clammily to the palate and dulled all the senses. Drawn by some strange force from the unfathomable depths below, eerie shapes sought the surface, blinking glassily at the unfamiliar glare they had exchanged

for their native gloom,—uncouth creatures bedight with tasselled fringes like weed-growths waving around them, fathom-long medusæ with coloured spots like eyes clustering all over their transparent substance, wriggling worm-like forms of such elusive matter that the smallest exposure to the sun melted them, and they were not. Lower down, vast pale shadows crept sluggishly along, happily undistinguishable as yet, but adding a half-familiar flavour to the strange, faint smell that hung about us. Of the ordinary fish which attend a vessel under healthful conditions few were to be seen. Such stragglers as occasionally came near were languid and purposeless in their movements, as if infected by the universal *malaise* that only fostered foul and fermenting growths. The sole exceptions were the sharks, who came and went as stealthily, but as eagerly as ever.

Such a morbific, unwholesome condition of our environment as this utter cessation of the revivifying motion of the aerial ocean, with its beneficent reaction upon the watery world beneath, could not fail sooner or later to affect the health of the crew. Doubtless the heavy toil in which all hands were continually engaged during the day put off the coming disaster longer than would otherwise have been the case. But the ship was ill found, the meat was partially decayed, and the bread honeycombed by various vermin. The water alone was comparatively sweet, although somewhat flavoured with tar, for

we had caught it as it fell from the surcharged skies. There was no change of dietary, no fresh provisions, except when, as a great banquet once in two months, an allowance of soup and bouilli was served out, which only suggested a change, hardly supplied it. Men grew listless and uncompanionable. Each aloof from his fellows took to hanging moodily over the bulwarks and staring steadfastly at the unpleasant surface of the once beautiful sea. And the livid impalpabilities that, gigantic and gruesome, pursued their shadowy, stealthy glidings beneath seemed to be daily growing more definite and terrible. The watchers glared at them until their overburdened imagination could support the sight no longer, and they sought relief by hoarse cries from the undefinable terror. One by one the seamen fell sick, apparently with scurvy, that most loathsome ailment, that seems to combine in itself half a dozen other diseases and reproduces old and long-forgotten wounds. It was accompanied, too, by partial blindness, as of moon-stroke, rendering the sufferers utterly unable to see anything at night, even though by day their sight was still fairly good. Already short-handed, this new distress added greatly to the physical sufferings of the patient mariners, who endured with a fortitude seldom seen among merchant seamen the slowly accumulating burden of their sorrows. The questioning look before noted as visible in every man's eyes now took another meaning. As a

recent and a most powerful writer, Joseph Conrad, has noticed, one of the strongest superstitions current among seamen is the notion that such an abnormal condition of the elements calls for a human victim. Life must be paid that the majority may live. Whose would it be? No word was spoken on the subject, but the sequel showed how deeply seated was the idea.

At last from among the brooding men one figure detached itself and became prominent with an unearthly significance. He was an old and feeble man named Peter Burn, unfitted in any case to endure much longer the ordinary stress of a sailor's life. But suddenly his frailty seemed to obtrude itself persistently upon our notice until his worn-out frame became almost transparent. Towards the close of this moribund state of the elements Peter's mind grew retrospective. His present surroundings seemed to fade from his knowledge, becoming, as far as he was concerned, non-existent. Hour after hour he would lie yarning incessantly of bygone exploits in long-forgotten ships on many seas. In the long, quiet evenings all hands that were able would gather round with pipes aglow and listen silently to his babbling, flowing like a placid stream of sound, contrasting curiously with the lurid language in which he revived the scenes of riot, bloodshed, and license of his distant youth. He still relished a pipe, although he hardly seemed aware whether it was alight or not. But there was always some one

ready to catch it as it fell from his trembling jaws, or to support it tenderly with one hand while a light was applied with the other. Day by day his detachment from present things increased. He lived only in the misty past, his immediate environment became a perfect blank, and he called his shipmates by strange names. Of any want of the consolations of religion he manifested no sign, and as there was none to offer them, the pathos of that dreadful indifference passed unnoticed.

At last, one evening, when a sticky haze rose sluggishly from the fermenting sea, peopling the immediate vicinity of the ship with fantastic shapes, Peter raised his voice in an astonishing volume of sound, commanding his attendants to carry him on deck. They instantly obeyed. Very tenderly and cautiously they bore him to the top-gallant forecastle, whence a clear view could be obtained all around. Through the hedge of mist the moon was rising, a vast blood-red disc, across the face of which passed in weird procession formless phantoms of indefinite and ever-varying suggestiveness. Overhead, the lustreless stars looked down wearily out of a sky that had paled from its deep azure to a neutral tint of green. From beneath, the foul effluvia ascended like the air of a charnel-house. Even the gleaming phosphorescence in the wake of the living things below glared pale and slow. The heavy silence around was only broken at long intervals by the melancholy wail of a weary sea-bird that feared to rest on the glairy sea. On

board the voice of our ancient shipmate prattled on in tones scarcely human and in language unintelligible to any of us. As the moon, rising clear of the steaming vapours, resumed her normal appearance, she shot a pallid beam across us where, like a group of ghosts, we crouched around Peter's prone form. When the cold ray touched his face it suddenly changed, and became beautiful, but only for a moment. Then the withered, toothless jaw dropped, the dim eyeballs settled in their sockets, and Peter passed from among us. Like a voice from heaven came the command, breaking the heavy stillness, "Square away the main-yard." As men in a dream we obeyed. But the sweet breeze aroused us as it swept away the fœtid mist in reluctant rolls and eddies. A joyful sound like the musical murmur of a brooklet arose from beneath the forefoot as the good ship resumed her long-hindered journey through the reviving sea, and the long calm was over.

Then when sail had been trimmed, and gear coiled up again, came the sailmaker softly, a roll of worn canvas under his arm, and his palm and needle ready. In ten minutes a long white bundle was borne reverently aft and laid on a hatch, where a mass of sandstone was secured to its smaller end. The skipper produced a worn Prayer-book, from which, like one determined to do his duty at all cost, he doggedly read the Order for the Burial of the Dead right through. All hands stood round in the moonlight with bare heads and set faces

until the skipper's voice ceased. Then at a sign from the mate four of us lifted the hatch to the rail, slowly raised its inner end and held it steadily, while, with a slow hiss, its burden slid into the sea and disappeared beneath a shining column of emerald green.

II

THE LOSS OF THE FIRST-BORN

She was his latest bride; the joy of his great heart as well as the flower of his goodly flock. And as he swept proudly through the foaming sea, with her graceful form gliding sinuously by his side, at the head of the mighty school in all the exultation of his overlordship of those Titans, he often sprang clear into the bright air in the fulness of his gigantic life and measureless delight of living it. After having in this way somewhat quieted his exuberant spirits, he swam sedately enough by the side of his favourite again, and resumed the serious conversation they had been having. He told her they would arrive at the island to-morrow, and she would then see what a sweet spot he had selected for the birthplace of their first-born. There was deep water right up to the edge of the widespreading reef. Shallow winding channels, that only sagacious whales, humpbacks like themselves, could find or thread amid the incessant rolling of the enormous breakers, led into a spacious lagoon behind, where

there was no greater depth than six fathoms. The floor of those quiet quarters was delightfully jagged, so that she would be able easily to chafe off every last barnacle and limpet from the lovely folds of her charming breast. As for food, the place was alive with tender young squid and sea-slugs, all fat and juicy. And as he spoke he caressed her lovingly with his fifteen-feet fin that spread like a wing from the broad expanse of his side, while she gazed up at him affectionately out of the corner of her tiny eye.

When she instinctively expressed her fear of the ever-vigilant sharks, who love nothing better than a tender young calf, he comforted her by an assurance that there was little need to fear them there. If a stray one should come prowling round she was to attack him at once, as he would almost certainly be alone. Then his voice took a graver tone as his wound reminded him of the greatest danger of all, and one of which she had no experience. He told her how to some of the quiet haunts of their people came occasionally white things, with long thin legs, walking on top of the water. They were not nearly as big as a whale, but there seemed to be smaller living things in them that were terrible and dangerous. They bit with long sharp teeth, they had arms hundreds of feet long, and they knew no pity even for languid mother and new-born calf. They had killed vast numbers of the whale-folk, and the thought of his escape from them made him

ache with fright, though it was so many years ago. But, happily, they could not come everywhere, and he had chosen this shelter for her because it was barred against them.

Even as he spoke, the school swept into sight of a vast barrier of coral, and, settling down many fathoms, they skirted its base rooted in the eternal buttresses of the world. Grand and awful was the view, but they heeded it not, being on business bent, with no admiration to waste on the gorgeous scene or appreciation of the untellable marvels of the deep,—matters of every day with them. Presently they rose near enough to the surface to hear the solemn roar of the league-long line of resistless breakers overhead, and, turning with them, followed their lord and leader into one of the channels he had spoken of. It wound its tortuous way for a couple of miles through the great reef, the stillness of the placid shallows strangely disturbed by the thundering return of the displaced water as the troop of leviathans paddled gently through its intricacies. At length they emerged into a wide lagoon, bounded on one side by towering masses of black rock rising tier upon tier for over two thousand feet. In every other direction the sea raised a rampart of dazzling foam, which seemed never to subside for one moment, or reveal even a remote chance of entry.

For the next two days they stayed with her, exploring every corner, finding it truly, as the Master had said, a place of ten thousand for a

refuge from all enemies. At last, when the patient mother-to-be had settled upon a shady pool beneath a huge overhanging crag as her favourite spot, they all bade her farewell, formed into line and departed, leaving her to the unfailing ministrations of the good Nurse Nature, with a promise to return again in about ten days.

On the second day of her loneliness a little son was born to her, a pretty, frolicsome creature about eight feet long, his tender, shining, dark skin elegantly mottled with splashes of grey, while the tiny furrows of his belly were white as curd. And the proud mother lolled in her cool corner feeding her babe from her bounteous breast, feeling supremely happy. He was a very well-spring of joy to her, every move of his lithe young body, every puff from his tiny spiracle, giving a new pang of delight. Nor did anything harmful come near. But she never relaxed her vigilant watch; not the faint splash of a gannet after a fleeting flying-fish but sent a shudder of apprehensive energy through her mighty frame.

For one blissful week there was perfect peace. Then came a morning when the glorious blue sky grew grey and greasy, then black as soot. A deathlike silence fell. The harmless fish and other denizens of the reef crept into crevices of the coral, and all the birds fled wailing away. She was filled with an undefinable dread; a loneliness unfelt before shrank every fibre with fear. Moving uneasily about the restricted area of her shelter,

her calf clutched closely under her fin, she saw spear after spear of crimson flame cleave the swart heavens, while immense boulders of red-hot rock fell in a hurtling hail around her. A seething torrent of molten lava amid a dense fog of steam fell with a deafening hiss into the sea. Desperately she sought to descend, but forgetting the bottom so near, dealt herself a fearful blow. Then in frantic fear for her youngling, she rushed, holding him closer to her breast, around the barrier, seeking the passage through which they had entered. Almost exhausted with her exertions, she found it, fled along its windings with the rock heaving and groaning around her, and at last plunged exultantly through the boiling breakers down, down into peace. But unsatisfied, still she toiled on to leave that accursed place far behind, nor rested except to breathe her offspring until she was a hundred miles away.

Then, secure from that terror, she took her ease, thinking poor mother, that all danger was past. But alas for her hopes! A grim silent shadow shot past as she lay basking on her side, her calf lazily sucking. Startled into sudden activity, she sprang forward her full length, swiftly sweeping her wide fins back and forth in search of her infant. Again that dark form flew past her side, bearing away on the projecting sword from its head the body of her first-born writhing in sudden death.

III

A TRUE SHARK-STORY

"How very hard it is to provide for a young, fast-growing family nowadays," said the mother shark, turning, for the hundredth time that morning, upon her broad side in order to get a better view of what might be stirring above. For nearly a week she had been fasting—in fact ever since she came in hurriedly at the close of a great feast upon the stripped carcase of a recent whale. There, by dint of the energy of her massive shoulders, her fourteen feet of length, and fivefold rows of triangular teeth, she had managed to secure a respectable proportion of the spoil for the replenishing of her own huge maw as well as for the upkeep of the fourteen sharklings that were now restlessly darting in and out of their cosy cave at the far end of her capacious throat.

Within the immediate range of her glance a vast black shadow obscured a wide, irregularly shaped area of the blazing sunshine. It was so calm that the shadow seemed stationary. In the direction of this cool penumbra her gaze lingered

earnestly. For hereditary instinct as well as long experience gave her the knowledge that from the substance of such shadows came food dropping down, varied and toothsome, actually alive upon rare occasions. Somewhat impatiently she wondered at the long time that her little blue and gold attendant had been gone. He was so seldom absent from his place between her eyes for a whole minute that she got quite uneasy. But while she fidgeted fretfully, with many twitchings of her flexible "gaff topsail," back came the pilot-fish in a tearing hurry. "Now then, partner, move along, do. There's a lump of fat pork almost as big as your head hanging over that ship's stern. I don't quite understand why it doesn't sink, but it *is* good. I nibbled just a crumb, and you can be sure this time that it's no bagful of cinders like that nasty mouthful that gave you the chest-ache so bad this morning." The latter part of this energetic exordium was lost upon Mother Shark, being drowned in the wash set up by her great tail-fin, which was going in grand style, starting her off at such a rate that two or three stragglers of the family had to skip like shrimps to get indoors before they were left behind and lost.

Straight as an arrow to the mark went the tiny guide, keeping just in front of his huge friend's snout. Together they swept into the shadow, where, sure enough, a mass of meat hung just below the sea surface, though gently lifted almost out of water every now and then. "Oh, do

look, Mamma! *there's* a big fish. Is he going to eat up that pretty little one, do you think?"—"Oh, no, my little man," struck in the mate, "but you watch him *now*." As he spoke the great grey body took a curve laterally, a dazzling glare of white appeared, and there, beneath the speaker, was a crescentic gap in the smooth, livid underside, fringed with innumerable points like *chevaux-de-frise*, and as big as the gape of a coal-sack. Around it the small pilot circled excitedly at top speed. Slowly it rose beneath the bait, which the mate as gently slacked away, there was a gulp, and the big joint disappeared. There was a flash, a splash, and an eddy. Then the rope attached to the shark-hook concealed in that pork groaned over the rail as it felt the strain.

"Lay aft the watch," roared the mate, and amid the trampling of many feet, a babel of directions, and a tremendous tumult alongside, through the writhings of the captive monster, she was transferred forward to the lee gangway, where, by the aid of a stout watch-tackle, she was hoisted out of water.

"Don't take him aboard," cried the captain; "make such an infernal mess if you do. Just spritsle yard him 'n let him go agen." So a piece of scantling was got from the carpenter, pointed at both ends, about four feet long. This they drove through her jaws from side to side. Another wedge-shaped piece was planted diagonally down through her broad snout, the upper end pointing forrard.

Then they cut off the wide pectoral fins, letting the quivering carcase fall into the sea again by the simple expedient of chopping the hook out. "What abominable cruelty," muttered a gentle-faced man among the crowding passengers, as he turned away sick at heart. But the bustling seamen looked pityingly at him, wondering doubtless at his lack of sporting instincts. Thus disabled, the miserable monster plunged blindly in uncertain directions, unable to steer herself, unheeding the frantic caresses of her faithful little satellite, who had almost exhausted himself by leaping up at her as she hung struggling against the vessel's side. Neither did she notice the puzzled, wavering movements of her wondering brood. So she disappeared from the view of the laughing, happy crowd on deck. But whichever way she rushed she always fetched up to the surface promptly, because of the vane in her head. Thus for a day and a night she fought aimlessly with all the forces of amazing vitality pent up in her huge body against these torturing disablements, until mercifully she fell in with a couple of ravenous congeners. Scenting fresh blood they made for her straightway. Like mad things they fell upon her. Long and hard they strove, tearing their way through the tough framework until assistance came from all quarters, and a motley multitude of various hungry ones cleaned up every shred of the welcome banquet, leaving only the deserted pilot to seek another partner.

IV

THE SLAVER

Ras Nungwe stood out boldly against the deep azure of the midnight sky, its rugged outlines softened and etherealised by the flood of molten light flowing from the rising moon. Within the velvety shadow which extended far to the north-westward from that bold headland lay our brig, a lonely, almost pathetic object, with sails all vertical in the utter calm, and taut as boards with the drenching dew. The royals, peering above the enwrapping dark, gleamed silvery-white where the unintercepted moon-rays touched them, crowning the homely craft with a radiant halo of silver sheen. I stood alone in the silent gloom of the deck completely absorbed in the solemn beauty of the scene, and utterly unmindful for the present of the severe stress of our encompassing emergencies. After the fierce heat of the glowing day the caressing coolness of the hour was a pure delight, for, although not a breath lifted the down fringing the dog-vane suspended just above my head, there was a freshness in the atmosphere which belied the

thermometer. A sound rippled along through the quiet, sending a responsive thrill over my scalp, as of an attuned nerve. Mellow and sustained, the clear call of the Muezzin from the minaret in Zanzibar Town had travelled this great distance, bearing its tremendous challenge, "Allah ho Akbar!" Dropping all consonants on its way, only the open vowels persisted; but even so, none could mistake the words. Obedient even in sleep to the call of his faith, Sa'adi, our Suahili steward, turned upon his mat near the mainmast, and rising to his feet, with hands outstretched before him, began in low gutturals the majestic ritual of the Mussulmani, "Bismillahi 'Rahmanni 'Raheem."

Meanwhile, the swelling tide of moonlight had invaded the sombre area wherein we lay until the whole of the vessel was shining in purest light. Every rope, spar, and sail, shimmering in that wonderful luminosity, looked unearthly, a phantom that the returning sun would dissipate with his workaday beams. Here and there on the deck, wherever a little shelter could be found from the soaking dew, lay figures in many an uneasy attitude, brokenly slumbering and muttering through the helpless delirium of fever; for all hands save the second mate, myself, two Malagasy, and two Arabs, were desperately sick. The poisonous malaria which crawls stealthily to the Zanzibar anchorage out of the foulness of that most filthy town, aided by the treacherous exhalations from the soil everywhere, had stricken

them down, and their only hope of recovery seemed to lie in escape from that dangerous vicinity. Therefore, but principally because of our affection for our suffering skipper, with his wife and child all tossing in delirium, we had dared to get under weigh and proceed to sea in such a plight. But now, relieved by my careful brother officer, I went below, knowing from painful experience that, stifling as the air might be down in my berth, it was far safer than on deck.

I awoke streaming as if in the sudatorium of a Hammam, and after a careful rub down and complete change of rig, returned on deck to relieve my faithful partner. A small air from the African land was just lifting the lighter sails, and making a pleasant little ripple warble alongside. One of the Malagasy, a docile Betsimasaraka, came to the wheel, necessitating a careful watch over his well-meant but generally misdirected efforts on my part, since the duty was as yet strange to him. Still, I had leisure to take my fill of admiring wonder at the completely changed scene. We now sailed on a sea of silver, the moon being almost vertical. Out of that radiant level rose the dark battlements of the great island, its clear-cut outlines in sharp contrast to the pellucid sky. Far ahead loomed the misty mass of Pemba, and on the left a long, low streak of gloom, lit up here and there by gleaming stretches of shining sand, showed the proximity of Africa,

ancient land of mystery. A subdued murmur, like that of a shell, but with an occasional swell therein, was rather suggested than heard, so unceasing was its deep monotone, the unresting roll of the Indian Ocean upon those lonely shores. At no great distance from us a snowy feather occasionally showed itself where the slumbering sea was momentarily ruffled in its regular roll by an outlying spur of coral close to the surface.

In striking contrast to those bright gleams the black blotch made by some toiling fisherman's small canoe showed up against the bright waters like a patch of rock. Presently, out of the misty environs of a small island to leeward, came the faint but unmistakable sound of oars strenuously worked. The night-glasses revealed the sinister shape of a dhow heading towards us, a foam-wreath sparkling at her bows as if she was going at a great rate. "More slaves," I thought bitterly, for night navigation is not favoured by Arabs except upon excursions that do not bear the light well. Fervently I hoped that some of my countrymen were lying hidden near enough to stop those incarnate devils on their infernal errand. Forgetting all else, I strained my eyes through the glasses at the swiftly approaching dhow. The course he was making would bring him closely past us, and eventually land him at the extreme northern end of Zanzibar Island.

Hoping against hope, I swept the horizon earnestly with the glasses, my gaze lingering for

long in the direction where lay the guardship with five hundred eager fellows on board ready to take any risk to stop such a villainous craft as was now befouling the seascape, did they but know of her presence. I had nearly given up all hope, when to my intense delight I saw coming in our direction from Pemba a tiny cloud of black smoke. Hardly knowing how to contain myself, I rushed below, found a rocket, and leaning it against the rail, touched it off. With a hiss like a bursting steam-pipe it soared aloft, scaring my poor Malagasy helmsman almost into a fit, and bursting at a splendid height into five blazing stars, an imperative call to any cruising naval launch near. The flying slaver never swerved or halted. On the contrary, she was evidently adding to her speed. But to my satisfaction the small black thread of smoke ahead now showed a lurid glow running through it. Doubtless they had grasped the intention of my signal, and were making their little craft do her best to obey it. Within a cable's length the dhow passed our stern, her straining crew yelling curses at us in mellifluous Suahili. Pitiful, indeed, would have been our case could those merciless flesh-hunters then have had their will of us. But with double-banked sweeps they strove to gain the shore, scenting the pursuers they could not see. Nearer drew the trailing smoke-wreath, until beneath it I could discern the slender shape of a steam-launch. And then I rejoiced to see her change her course so as to cut off the dhow ere she could reach the objective

her crew were straining every sinew to attain. Breathlessly I watched the manœuvre, disregarding the unwelcome failure of the gentle breeze that again left us motionless. At last there was a flash from the launch's bow, followed by a sullen boom, the sweetest sound imaginable to my hungry ears. Another flash, and then the bright foam faded from the dhow's sides, showing that they had ceased their efforts to escape. A short silence ensued, followed by a faint rattle of small-arm fire.

Although the grey light of dawn was now displacing the almost blue-black of the night sky, the two craft were so far away that I could not see how my brethren were faring, but almost unconsciously I breathed a prayer for their success. Then, in gorgeous array of green and purple and gold, conquering daylight rushed across the sky, paling the bright moon and quenching the sweet stars in the ineffable glory of a new morn. All the beauties of the adjacent shores sprang into sight, completing the splendid picture. But, best of all, over that devilish dhow now floated the white-and-red folds of St. George's Cross, whose appearance anywhere always gives an Englishman an accelerated heart-beat. How much more, then, when it is seen sheltering those who were lost, helpless, and hopeless slaves. Before long the dhow was taken in tow by the launch, which headed towards us. I ran up the old Red Ensign, dipping it gaily in salute to the victors in so noble a cause. As she passed close under our stern the

officer in charge, waving his cap, shouted : "Many thanks, sir, for your signal. We should certainly have missed the prize without it. She has one hundred and fifteen slaves on board, all ages and both sexes, packed like sardines in a tin. It is a splendid haul. Good-bye, sir, and a most pleasant passage to you." I would have answered him in many words, but something choked my utterance, and I could only wave my hand in hearty farewell. I could not help a feeling of satisfaction as I noticed several prone figures on the dhow's deck with crimson stains on their dingy white garments. There are times when the Mosaic law seems to all of us the only satisfying adjustment of rewards.

Of the long days that followed before we finally cleared those sultry shores, days of anxiety and nights of constant care, much could be told did space permit. One by one the haggard, quinine-saturated invalids resumed their watch, wistfully seeking to help, but so weak that their faltering steps failed them oftentimes. But gradually they gathered strength, until by the time that Zanzibar had faded below the blue horizon every one mustered at watch-changing, and our little company remained complete.

V

THE CRUISE OF THE 'DAISY'

Something, doubtless, akin to the contact of the naked soul with its God is the feeling of conscious nothingness that enwraps a man who finds himself alone in some tiny craft upon the unbroken circle of the sea. Even more so, perhaps, when he has a vessel under his feet, than when he survives upon some frail fabric of hastily gathered flotsam, the lost company of his fellows. For in the former case he has leisure for calm thought, need for skill and energy; none of which qualities will avail him much in the latter, where it is but a question of a little more or less firm hold upon fleeting life. To this conclusion I am led from experience of both situations, about the former of which I would fain speak now.

As the result of a series of adventures while mate of an old Cumberland brig under the nominal command of one of the most besotted drunkards I have ever known, I found myself adrift in an Acadian coast village early in December, friendless and penniless. Already the icy barrier was rapidly

forming which would effectually bar all navigation until the ensuing spring, and the thought of being thus frozen up in helpless idleness for months, coupled with the prospect of winter for my young wife in England without my support, was almost more than I could bear. Kismet threw in my way the commander, owner, and builder of a tiny schooner, who, disgusted with his "bad luck," had freighted his cockleshell with the harvest of his farm, three hundred barrels of potatoes, and purposed sailing for the West Indies in order to sell vessel and cargo. Of ocean navigation he knew nothing, all his previous nautical experience having been confined to the rugged coasts of Nova Scotia, so that he was highly elated at the idea of engaging a mate with a London certificate. Not that he would have hesitated to launch out into the Atlantic without any other knowledge than he possessed, without chronometer, sextant, or ephemeris. Like many of the old school of seafarers, now perhaps quite extinct, he would have reckoned upon finding his way to port in time by asking from ship to ship sighted on the passage, for he was in no hurry. I was in no mood for bargaining—a way of escape was my urgent need—and in a few hours from our meeting we were busily rowing the wee craft down the fast-emptying river. The crew consisted of the skipper, his ten-year-old son, myself, and a gawky, half-witted lad of sixteen, who strutted under the title of cook. Bitter, grinding poverty was manifest in every

detail of our equipment, principally in the provisions, which consisted solely of a barrel of flour, a small tub of evil-smelling meat (source unknown), and a keg of salt flavoured with a few herrings. Of course, there was the cargo, and the skipper concealed, moreover, under his pillow a few ounces of tea, about 3 lb. of wet sugar in an oozing bag, and a bottle of "square" gin. "Medical comforts," he explained, with an air of knowing what ought to be carried on a deep-water voyage.

For the first five hundred miles we groped our way through fantastic wreaths of frost-fog, its dense whiteness enclosing us like a wall, and its pitiless embrace threatening to freeze the creeping blood in our veins, while, invisible, the angry currents of the fiercest tideway in the world bubbled beneath us like a witch's cauldron, whose steam was fluid ice, after whirling us top-wise in defiance of wind and helm. Strange noises assailed our ears, and a feeling of uncertain suspension as though sailing in the clouds possessed our benumbed faculties. But as if guided by an instinctive sense of direction, the skipper succeeded in fetching the New Brunswick shore, entering Musquash Harbour without hesitation, and anchoring a scant bowshot from the frozen strand. Wasting no time, very precious now, we landed, restoring our feeble circulation by felling a large number of beautiful young silver birches, which, like regular ranks of glittering ghosts, stood thickly everywhere. Our sea-stock of fuel

provided, we broke up the armour-plated covering of ice over a swiftly-flowing streamlet and filled our solitary water-cask, an irksome task, since the water froze as we poured. With enormous difficulty we shipped these essentials, and in all haste weighed again, and stole seaward into the gathering gloom. Night brought a bitter gale, whose direction barely enabled us to creep under a tiny triangle of canvas towards the narrow portals of the Bay of Fundy. The flying spray clung to masts and rigging, clothing them with many layers of ice, till each slender spar and rope gleamed huge above our heads through the palpable dark. The scanty limits of the deck became undistinguishable from the levels of an iceberg, to which offspring of the sombre North our little craft was rapidly becoming akin. Below, in the stuffy, square den, the "cook" continually fed the ancient stove with crackling birchwood and made successive kettlesful of boiling burnt-bread coffee, while the half-frozen skipper and his mate relieved each other every half-hour for a brief thaw. In such wise we reached a sheltered nook behind Cape Sable, anchoring in a culminating blizzard of snow, and fleeing instantly to the steaming shelter below. Outside our frail shell the tempest howled unceasingly throughout the long, long night. When the bleak morning broke the little ship was perched precariously, like some crippled sea-bird, upon three pinnacles of rock. The sea had retreated from us for nearly a mile,

and all the grim secrets of its iron bed lay revealed under the cold, grey dawn. Overhead hung gigantic icicles like sheaves of spears from the massive white pillars that concealed our identity with man's handiwork, and at imminent risk we must needs break them down in order to move the vessel when the inrushing flood should again set her free. Presently it came, a roaring yellow mass of broken water, laden with all the varied débris of that awful coast. But we were ready for it, and by strenuous toil managed to get into a safe anchorage.

Seven short days and long ghastly nights we lay there waiting a chance to escape. Christmas came and went, bringing with it bitter thoughts of home, but no word was spoken on the subject. The skipper's little son lay feverishly tossing in the delirium of measles, his father's face an impenetrable mask, but whether of stoicism or stolidity I could not tell. At last the wind softened, changed its direction, and breaking up the gloomy pall of cloud, allowed a few pale gleams of sun to peep through, welcome as sight to the blind. Scrambling ashore, we cut down a wide-spreading young spruce-tree, and after a struggle of two hours succeeded in getting it on board with all its matted branches intact. Then, tearing out the anchor in a fury of energy and desire to be gone, we stood to the southward with our strange deck-load. A few short hours, and what a change! As if under the breath of some kindly angel, the

ice and snow melted from around us, the pleasant thrill of expanding life returned. It was no new miracle, only the sweet influence of that mild but mighty ocean river, the Gulf Stream, into whose beneficent bosom we had crept like a strayed and perishing child. How we revelled in the genial warmth. With what delight we bathed our stiffened limbs in those tepid waters, feeling life and comfort surge back to us as if from their very source.

Just a little while for recovery, and then round swung the wind again. The dismal curtains of the sky were drawn, and the melancholy monotone of the advancing storm wailed through our scanty rigging. Right across the path of the great stream it blew, catching the waves in their stately march, and tearing their crests furiously backward. Fiercer and louder howled the gale, while the bewildered sea, irresistibly borne north-eastward by the current and scourged southward by the ever-increasing storm, rose in pyramidal heaps which fell all ways, only their blinding spray flying steadfastly to leeward. In that welter of conflicting elements, whence even the birds had fled, we were tossed like any other bubble of the myriads bursting around. Sail was useless to steady her, for the towering billows becalmed it ; neither dared we risk our only canvas blowing away. So when it appeared that there was a little more truth in the trend of the sea, we moored the cable to the trunk of our tree and cast it overboard. And to that strangely transformed plant we rode as to a floating

anchor, held up head to sea, save when the persistent swell rose astern in a knoll of advancing water and hurled us three hundred fathoms forward in a breath. Nine weary watches of four hours each did I stand by the useless wheel, breathlessly eyeing the tigerish leap of each monstrous wave until it swept by leaving us still alive. Yet while the skipper stood his watch I slept, serenely oblivious of the fearful strife without. So bravely, loyally did the little *Daisy* behave that hope rose steadily, until just as the parting clouds permitted a ray of moonlight to irradiate the tormented sea, there was a sudden change in her motion. As if worn out by the unequal strife, she fell off into the sea-trough, a mountain of black water towered above her, and in one unbearable uproar she disappeared. Blinded and battered out of all sense, I knew no more until I found myself clinging to the wheel with a grip that left indented bruises all over my arms. She had survived, and, as if in admiration for her valiant fight, the sea fell and left her safe. The tree-trunk had been sawn right through, but its work was done.

. . . . . .

Beneath pleasant skies we plodded southward to our destined port, arriving uneventfully at Antigua after a passage of thirty-five days.

VI

'RUNNING THE EASTING DOWN'

DESPITE the inroads made upon sail by steam, a goodly fleet of sailing ships still survive, many of them magnificent specimens not only of marine architecture, but also of the cunning handiwork of the modern "rigger." The enormous sail-area shown by some of these ships and the immense spread of their yards would have staggered the daring skippers of forty years ago, when the China tea-clippers were the greyhounds of the seas, and the Yankee flyers were wiping the eyes of their sturdy British compeers. But in order to see these majestic vessels at their best it is necessary to be on board one of them on a voyage to or from the Far East. Their troubles are often many and their hindrances great until they reach those Southern parallels where, after a spell of "doldrums" varying with the season, they pick up those brave west winds that, unhindered, sweep in almost constant procession around the landless Southern slopes of the world. This is no place for weaklings either among ships or men. If a

passage is to be made and a vessel's reputation for swiftness, apart from steam-power, to be either sustained or acquired, here is the field. There is none like unto it. Not only should canvas, hemp, and steel be of the best, but the skipper must be stout of heart, not to be daunted by threatening skies, mountainous seas, or wandering islands of ice. More than all these, he must to-day be prepared to face the probability of his scanty crew being quite unable to handle the gigantic pinions of his vessel should the favouring breeze rise, as it often does, to such a plenitude of power as to make it most dangerous for them to be longer spread.

To take a typical instance: the 5000 ton four-masted sailing ship *Coryphæna*, laden with general merchandise for Melbourne, reached the latitude of Cape Frio on the thirty-fifth day from London. Like all of her class, she was but weakly manned, but as if to provide against any possible emergencies of sail-carrying, her enormous masts of mild steel were quadruply stayed with steel cables, until they were almost like an integral part of the massive fabric herself. From truck to mast-coat not a shaking of hemp was used for cordage where steel wire rope or chain could be made available. Neither were any old-time lashings, lanyards, or seizings to be seen. Their places were filled by screws and levers, whereby one man could exert more power on a shroud or a guy than was formerly possible to a dozen,

aided by a complicated web of tackles. And the sails, those vast breadths of canvas that, when set, made the mighty hull appear but a trivial thing beneath their superb spread, were of the heaviest quality woven, their seams, leaches, and roaches fortified by all the devices known to the sailmaker.

The skipper paced the poop with uncertain steps, hardly able to conceal his impatience at the dallying of the light airs that only made the great squares of canvas slam sullenly against the masts, and wear themselves thin. Longingly his eyes lingered on the western horizon, hungering for sign of the "Westerlies." His eager gaze was at last rewarded by the vision of a sombre arch of lowering cloud, which slowly upreared its grim segment above the setting sun. The fitful south-easterly airs, dregs of the "Trades," which in their feeble variableness had so sorely tried his patience, gradually sank like the last few breaths of some expiring monster, leaving the sea glassy and restful under the dark violet of the evening sky. Only a long, regular swell came rolling eastward in rhythmical march, its placid undulations swaying the huge vessel gently as the drowsy rocking of an infant's cradle. But its indications were sufficiently precise to satisfy the skipper, who, after a peaceful pipe, retired early to rest, leaving orders to call him in the event of any sudden change. His manner, however, indicated that he expected nothing of the kind. After his departure the chief officer prowled

restlessly about the quarterdeck, being a man to whom the stagnation of a calm was an unmitigated calamity. At present his only satisfaction lay in noting how steadily the celestial bridge astern grew in breadth and altitude, while at the same time the swell became deeper, longer, and more definite in its direction.

By four bells the summits of the climbing cumuli forming the immeasurable arch in the west were right overhead, while the sky within its radius was now overspread with a filmy veil that hid the stars from view. Suddenly a chill breath touched his ear, sensitive as a hound's, and immediately his fretful lassitude was gone. He stood erect, alert, every nerve tense, ready for action. "Stand by, the watch!" he roared, and in response a few dark figures slouched into sight from the shadowy corners where they had been dozing away the leaden-footed hours. Then a cool stream of air came steadily flowing from the mysterious centre of the gloom abaft. "Square the main-yard!" shouted the mate again; and with eerie, wailing cries the great steel tubes were trimmed to the coming breeze. The order was hardly executed before, with a rush and a scream, out leapt the west wind from its lair, while with many a sharp report and grinding of gear being drawn into its grooves the huge fabric obeyed the compelling impulse and began her three thousand league stretch to the eastward. By midnight it blew a gale, to which the same vessel, had she

been bound in the opposite direction, must needs have shown but a scanty spread of sail. Now, nothing was further from the intention of the gleeful mate than the starting of a single thread.

At the relieving of the watch the skipper was called and informed of the change, so that upon him should rest the responsibility for "carrying on." For the driving fragments of storm-rent cloud were low, and by their meteor speed foretold that this was but a foretaste of the tempest to follow. Planting himself in his favourite attitude on the extreme weather-quarter, the captain fixed his eyes on the upper sails with a look of supreme content, though to an inexperienced gaze they would have seemed on the point of bursting into shreds, their very stitch-holes strained to gaping a quarter-inch long. Every one of her thirty-four wings were spread and drawing, for the wind being well on the quarter, allowed of the yards being canted forward, while the ship went "steady as a church," with a ten-degree list to port. Still the wind increased and faster drove the ship, until by daylight she was going a full sixteen knots, which, in spite of the Yankee yarns anent the *James Baines*, her main skysail, and her twenty-one knots, is about the maximum possible under sail. The first cheerless gleams of the new day revealed an awe-inspiring view. Far as could be seen the ocean surface was torn into snowy foam by the raging wind, for the sea had not yet time to get into the gigantic stride it would presently take in sympathy

with the irresistible march of the all-compelling storm. "Fine breeze, sir," chuckled the mate, rubbing his hands with delight. "Only hope it'll hold," replied the skipper, peering keenly aft into the eye of the wind. There, to a landsman, the sight was ominous, almost appalling. Dense masses of distorted nimbus came hurtling out of the deep gloom, which seemed to grow blacker and more menacing every hour. So through the howling day the big ship fled onward like a frightened thing, steady and straight as an ice-yacht over Lake Michigan, although at times an incipient sea smote her broadside, and, baffled, cast its crest aloft, where the shrieking blast caught it and whirled it in needle-like particles as high as the upper topsails.

When night drew in the sea had fairly risen, and came bellowing along in mountainous masses many miles in length at a speed that bade fair to overtake the fleeing ship. Strange it was to note how, as the waves grew, the ship seemed to dwindle until her huge bulk appeared quite insignificant. And now, at frequent intervals, enormous bodies of broken water hurled themselves on board, often filling the spacious decks flush fore and aft with a seething flood. And still the "old man" hung on, his courage and faith in the powers of his ship being justly rewarded by a week's run of over two thousand miles without the loss of a rope-yarn. Then the breeze gradually faltered, swerved from its steadfast direction, and worked round by the south, until at south-east it dropped lifeless for an

hour or so Then out from the north-east it rushed like a raving genie, almost catching the ship aback, and giving the scanty band of toilers a tremendous task to handle the immense squares of canvas that thundered like infuriate monsters against their restraining bonds. But in a short time the gale had veered round into the westward again, and the *Coryphæna* resumed her headlong race to the east. Running upon the arc of a great circle, she gradually worsened the weather as she reached higher latitudes. Stinging snow squalls came yelling after her, hiding everything behind a bitter veil. Past gigantic table-topped icebergs, floating mountains against whose gaunt sides the awful billows broke with deafening clangour, flinging their hissing fragments hundreds of feet into the gloomy sky. At last so fierce grew the following storm that the task of reducing sail became absolutely necessary. All hands were called and sped aloft to the unequal conflict. Scourged by the merciless blast, battered by the threshing sails, they strove for dear life through two terrible hours of that stern night. A feeble cry was heard, —a faint splash. Only a man dropped from the main top-gallant yard,—through one hundred and twenty feet of darkness into the yeasty smother beneath, and ere the news reached the deck, calm and peaceful below the tumult, more than a mile astern, swallowed by the ever-unsatisfied maw of the ravening sea. And onward like a meteor sped the flying ship, "running her Easting down."

VII

IN THE CROW'S NEST

Swinging through the clear sky, one hundred feet above the little stretch of white deck that looks so strangely narrow and circumscribed, the period of two hours assigned for a spell is often spent in strange meditations. For all the circumstances are favourable to absolute detachment from ordinary affairs. A man feels there cut off from the world, a temporary visitor to a higher sphere, from whose serene altitude the petty environment of daily life appears separated by a vast gulf. Rising to that calm plane in the shimmering pearly twilight of a tropical dawn, he is enabled to view, as from no other standpoint, the daily mystery and miracle of the sunrise. For he forgets the tiny microcosm below, involuntarily looking upward into the infinite azure until his mind becomes consciously akin to eternal verities, and sheds for a brief space the gross hamperings of fleshly needs and longings. At such a time, especially if the heavens be one stainless concave of blue, the advent of the new day is so over-

whelming in its glory that the soul is flooded with a sense of celestial beauty unutterable. Beautiful and glorious indeed are the changing tints and varying hues of early dawn upon the fleecy fields of cloud, but the very changeableness of the wondrous scene is unfavourable to the simple settlement of wondering, worshipping thought induced by the birth of unclouded light. At first there appears upon the eastern edge of the vast, sharply-defined circle of the horizon, that by a familiar optical illusion seems to bound a sapphire concavity of which the spectator is the centre, a tremulous, silky paling of the tender blue belonging to the tropical night. The glowing stars grow fainter, dimmer, ceasing to coruscate like celestial jewels studding the soft, dark canopy of the sky. Unlingering, the palpitating sheen spreads zenithwards, presently sending before it as heralds wide bars of radiance tinted with blends of colour not to be reproduced by the utmost skill of the painter. Before their triumphal advent the great cone of the zodiacal light, which, like a stupendous obelisk rising from the mere shadow of some ineffable central glow, to which the gigantic sun itself is but a pale star, has dominated the moonless hours, fades and vanishes. Far reaching, these heavenly messengers gild the western horizon, but when the eye returns to their source it has become "a sea of glass mingled with fire,"—a fire which consumes not, and, while glowing with unfathomable splendour, has

yet a mildness that permits the eye to search its innermost glories unfalteringly and with inexpressible delight.

But while the satisfied sight dwells upon this transcendent scene, forgetting that it is not the only morning in earth's history when it is to be lavished upon a favoured world, there is a sudden quickening of the throbbing light, along the sharp blue edge of the ocean runs a blazing rim of molten gold, and in a perfect silence, beneath which may be felt the majestic music of the spheres, the sun has come. Turn away the head; the trembling eyes cannot for an instant dwell upon that flaming fervent globe that at one mighty stride is already far above the horizon. The sweet face of the sea wears a million sparkling smiles of welcome—everywhere the advent of the Day-bringer has decked it with countless flashing gems. As if ecstatic in their appreciation of the banishment of night, a school of porpoises five thousand strong indulge in riotous gambols. Leaping high into the bright air, their shining, lithe bodies all a-quiver with pure joy of abundant life, they churn the kindly sea into foam, leaving in their mad, frolicsome rush a wide track of white on the smoothness behind them. So flawless is the calm that even the tiny argosy of the nautilus is tempted to rise and spread its silken sail, a lovely gauzy curve just a shade or so lighter in hue than the sapphire of the sea, and so discernible from that height to the practised eye. In quick

succession more and more appear, until a fairy fleet of hundreds is sailing as if bearing Titania and her train to some enchanted isles, where never wind blows loudly. But lo! as if at a signal from a pigmy Admiral, the squadron has vanished bubble-wise. From where they lately rode in mimic pageant rises, ghost-like, a vast flock of flying-fish, the hum of whose vibrant wing-fins ascends to the ear. Many thousands in number, glistening in the sunblaze like burnished silver, they glide through the air with incredible speed, the whole shoal rising and falling in wave-like undulations as if in the performance of preconcerted evolutions. They have been flying upon a plane of perhaps twenty feet above the sea for some five hundred yards, and are just about to re-enter the water, when beneath them appear the iridescent beauties of a school of dolphin (not the dull-hued mammal, but the poet-beloved fish). At that dread sight the solid phalanx breaks up, hurled back upon itself in the disorder of deadly panic. In little groups, in single fugitives, they scatter to every point of the compass, a hopelessly disorganised mob, whereof the weaker fall to swift oblivion in the gaping jaws of their brilliant, vigorous foes beneath. The main body sheer off, sadly thinned, in a fresh direction, long quivering raiders launching themselves in hot pursuit upon their rear, devouring as they rush, until eaters and eaten disappear, and the battlefield lies in placid beauty as if never disturbed. One hovering bird,

a "bo'sun," with long slender tail and feathers of purest white, circles around on unmoving, outspread pinions, slowly turning his pretty head, with dark incurious eyes, upon the strange biped so awkwardly perched in his dominions of upper air. Whence and when did he come? A moment since and he was not. Did the vacant ether produce him? Yet another moment and he is gone as he came, leaving behind him a palpable sense of loss.

But now all attention is concentrated upon the horizon, where the trained eye has caught a glimpse of something of greater interest than either bird or fish. A series of tiny puffs, apparently of steam, rises from the shining surface, but so evanescent that nothing but long-practised vision would discern them at so great a distance. Irregularly, both as to time and position, they appear, a shadowy procession of faintest indefinite outlines, a band of brief shadows. Yet upon them eager eyes are bent in keenest attention, for they represent possibilities of substantial gain, and bring the mind back from the realms of pure romance with the swiftness of a diving sea-bird down to the hard necessities of everyday life. They are the breathings of marine mammalia, mightiest of ocean's citizens, and strangest of links between the inhabitants of land and sea. A little keen scrutiny, however, reveals the disappointing fact that those feathery phantoms mark the presence of that special species of whales who enjoy complete

immunity from attack either from above or below. Their marvellous agility, no less than the exiguous covering of fat to which they have reduced the usually massive blubber borne by their congeners, gives abundant reason why they should be thus unmolested. So they roam the teeming seas in the enviable, as well as almost unique, position among the marine fauna of exemption from death, except by sickness or old age, as much as any sedate, law-abiding citizen of London. They seem to be well aware of their privileges, for they draw near the ship with perfect confidence, heeding her huge shadow no more than if she were a mass of rock rising sheer from the ocean-bed, and incapable of harm to any of the sea-folk. From our lofty eyrie we watch with keenest interest the antics of these great creatures, their amatory gambols, parental care, elegant ease, and keen sportiveness. Yonder piebald monster, who seems the patriarch of the school, after basking placidly in the scorching rays of the sun, now high in the heavens, gravely turns a semi-somersault, elevating the rear half of his body (some forty feet or so) out of the water. Then with steady, tremendous strokes he beats the water, the hundred square feet of his tail falling flatly with a reverberation like the sound of a distant bombardment. The others leap out of water, sedately as becomes their bulk, or roll over and over each other upon the surface, occasionally settling down until they look like fish of a foot or so in length. They

even dare to chafe their barnacle-studded sides against the vessel's keel, sending a strange tremor through her from stem to stern, which is even felt in the "crow's nest." But no one molests them in any way; in fact, it must be placed to the whaler's credit that he rarely takes life for "sport," though callous as iron where profit of any kind may be secured.

Oh, the heat; as if one's head were a focus for the sun himself, since there is little else for many leagues exposed for him to assail except the mirror-like ocean. Thence, too, the heat rises as if to place us between two fires, until we feel like the fakirs of India undergoing their self-imposed penance of the swing. How fervently thankful we are when at last the glorious orb descends so low that his slanting rays lose their power in great measure, and permit us again to take a reviving interest in our surroundings. Yon floating tree, for instance; we have long been wondering in a vague sort of dream what it might be. And indeed its appearance is strange enough to warrant considerable speculation. It has been adrift for months, and except upon the side which floats uppermost, is covered with barnacles, whose adhering feet have extended in some instances to a fathom in length, the tiny shells being almost invisible at the free ends. This wealth of living covering, waving gently as the log is rocked by the unseen swell, gives the whole thing an uncanny look, as of some strange un-

classified monster "begotten of the elder slime." Around it are playing in shoals fish of many kinds seen only in deep waters—fish of every luminous tint that can be imagined, and ranging in size from the lordly albacore, weighing a quarter of a ton, to the tiny caranx of a couple of inches long. But hush! there is a priceless freshness in the air. The weary day is shaking off the fervent embrace of her exhaustless bridegroom. Gentle, lovely shades of colour are replacing the intense glow. A little, little breeze creeps cautiously along, ruffling the grateful sea in patches of purple shadow. A more subdued glory gathers in the west than heralded the sun's ascending—a tenderer range of tints, like the afterglow of autumn as compared with the flaming blossoms of spring. For a few brief moments the gorgeous golden disc swims upon the edge of the lambent sea, and he is gone. Swiftly following him, the brilliant hues fade from the sky, shyly the stars peep out, and it is night.

VIII

THE BIRTH OF AN ISLAND

For many years Pacific mariners, both of white and dusky races, had known and dreaded the dangers of the Marae Reef. It lay right in the track of vessels between Opolu and Nieuwe, only visible to the seaman's eye from the mast-head on calm days as a slight discoloration of the brilliant blue sea that everywhere else bared its unstained depths of single colour. With a fresh Trade blowing there was no difficulty in locating it, for it made its menace heard as well as seen. The long, indolent Pacific swell, sweeping majestically from continent to continent across half the world, met this mushroom growth in its mighty path and immediately raised its awful voice in thunderous protest against such an addition to the already innumerable dangers of that perilous region. Not only so, but as if it would uproot the intruder from its massy foundations that broadened down into the matrix of the world, the wrathful wave arose in gigantic billows of foaming white, in the midst of which momentarily appeared the

defiant summits of living rock, steadfast and secure, while the ageless ocean vainly sought to uproot it from its eternal base. But such scenes were of the most infrequent occurrence. The normal conditions of those waters were peaceful, and the swell scarcely heavy enough to raise even a solitary breaker once a day. And as the scanty trade between the islands grew less and less, the danger of the reef, nay, almost its very existence, passed out of men's minds.

Still, heedless of either elemental strife or serenest calm, the microscopic masons toiled on, each in its tiny cell content to fulfil the conditions of its being and to add its infinitesimal quota to the world-fragment; then, having justified its existence, to pass into other forms of usefulness by means of the ever-active alchemy of Nature. But for those of the builders whose lot it was to reach the summit of the fabric which their united efforts had reared there was another ending, or rather transmutation. A swift oblivion awaited them, a sudden severance from their life-work, as the reef, now awash, was left temporarily dry by the ebbing tide. Yet all around them uncounted myriads of their co-workers toiled eagerly upward to the same personal fate, the same collective achievement, each adding some essential to form the perfect whole. Thus from generation to generation the fabric grew, so slowly by man's reckoning, so swiftly according to the hasteless chronology of creation, until there came a day when, after a more

placid period even than usual, the bared surface of the reef became covered with a dazzling floor of minutest fragments, ground from the countless pinnacles below by the unceasing attrition of the waves. Tide after tide lapped the infant beach, with kindliest murmur as of tender welcome, ever bringing fresh store of shining sand, until at low water of the spring tides there was a new spot of earth's surface gleaming white in that expanse of blue, like a snowflake new-fallen upon a vast sapphire.

A little bird, grey of feather and with long, slender legs, drifted softly out of the surrounding void, and alighted daintily upon this glistening earth-bud with a sweet, low chirp of content that also sounded like a note of welcome. With delicate, mincing steps the graceful visitor pattered over the crisp sand, prying with keen black eyes and fine, nervous beak into every cranny and worm-hole, and finding apparently many a tasty morsel to reward her visit. Evening brought another guest on family cares intent,—a huge turtle, whose broad, buckler-like carapace rose shining out of the limpid wave like the dome of some naiad's pearly palace under the silvern glow of the broad moon. But instinct, that infallible guide to the lesser intelligences of animate creation, warned the expectant parent that here, for some time at any rate, no safe *cache* might be found for the deposit of those precious round eggs of hers. So, after a leisurely survey of the scanty circlet, she

dragged her huge bulk lingeringly into the clear waters again, and was immediately transformed from a crawling reptile into a swift and graceful creature that cleft the waves like an arrow. Thenceforward many visitants came and went, birds, crustacea, and fish, most of them exchanging benefits with the new land, although any nascent germs of vegetation lay biding their appointed time until the sea should finally refrain from flinging an occasional lustration across the smiling face of the new-born islet. In due process of the suns, however, a wandering coco-nut came with many a backward sweep and much dallying upon the outskirts of the surrounding reef among the bewildering eddies, until at last a friendly wavelet caught it and spun it up high and dry, where it lay at rest, kept from rolling seaward again by a little ridge left in the sand, the impress of a more than usually vigorous breaker. In that soft scene of mild delight day succeeded day like the passing of a sunny afternoon dream, undisturbed by any clamorous voice of wind or hoarse note of ravin from the sea. Balmy airs, like the sweet breath of love, scarcely dimpled the serene face of the blue ocean around. In a beneficent flood the golden sunshine lavished its treasures upon the lonely ocean beneath by day, and by night the unaging glory of the silver stars, among whose countless hosts the quiet beauty of the lovely moon pursued her stately way, was perfectly reproduced in the same limitless mirror.

Beneath these gentle, yet irresistible, influences that solitary coco-nut felt its dim interior ferment with life. And out from the dead dryness of its husk sprang two slender arms; tender, beseeching things of a living green in almost startling contrast to the withered, storm-tossed envelope from whence they had emerged. In obedience to some hidden impulse one of them bent downwards and by slow persistence wrought its way into the sand, while the other lifted itself erect and presently unfolded a delicate green fan. Unwatched, unadmired, save by that Infinite Intelligence that fills the remotest corners of earth and sea with loveliness for Its own delight, the tiny tree strengthened daily, mooring itself ever deeper by spreading rootlets that reached down through the interstices of the reef beneath, and raising higher and higher in perfect beauty its feathery fronds of palest green, the earliest pioneer of the vegetable kingdom in this youthful patch of Mother Earth. After a while, as the coast-line extended and more of the dry land held its own against the engirdling deep, other plants of lower stature, but equal charm, managed to find a congenial root-hold in this seemingly barren patch of sand. Humble as they were, they gave to the islet the friendly tint that all eyes love, and made it more complete. Several migrant sea-birds halted here, and, finding the spot exactly suited to their needs, made it their home, laying their large eggs barely upon the smooth sand, and rearing in happy aloofness from all enemies their voracious broods.

Turtles no longer disdained the scanty beach as a safe hatching place for their plentiful stores of eggs, and strange waifs from far-away lands were arrested in their weary oscillations about the never-resting ocean and peacefully brought here to a final abiding-place.

So fared the uneventful, unnoted procession of days, months, and years, until one morning the now abundant, happy life of the island awoke, as was its wont, at the first warm breath of a new day. A soft blush of indescribable colour-blends replaced the dark violet of the night sky, whose shadows retreated before that conquering dawn as if in haste to allow the advent of its coming glory. Soon, heralded by spears, streamers, and sheaves of shining gold, the majestic silence of his entry smiting the waiting hemisphere like the trump of an archangel, the great sun rose. His first level rays glided across the glowing sea and fell upon the wan, upturned face of a man, flung like any other fragment of jetsam up from the heaving bosom of the Pacific, and left apparently lifeless on the sand near the trunk of the now sturdy tree. Under that loving touch of reviving warmth the pale, set features relaxed, a shudder as if of re-entering vitality shook the gaunt limbs, and presently the eyes unclosed. The first human visitor to the island sat up and stared vacantly around. His upturned eyes caught sight of the great green bunches of delicious young fruit hanging some twenty feet above his head, and the sight was tantalising

beyond measure to his leathery, cracking tongue and throat. He was far too weak to attempt such a task as climbing the tree would have been ; but a few of the eggs that lay near soon supplied him with fresh vigour, although the outraged birds protested all they knew against this strange experience, unlike anything hitherto troubling their peaceful life. But as the man grew stronger his proceedings troubled the original freeholders more and more. For he collected a great heap of drift-wood, including the mast of his own vessel, upon which he had been borne hither, and presently from out of the midst of the heap arose a heavy black pillar of smoke. Then through the smoke burst flashes of fire, before which all but those birds with young, whom no terrors would have driven them from, fled shrieking away. As the man grew stronger he climbed the tree, and drank greedily from the sweet liquid filling the young nuts ; but while he sat there among the far-spreading leaves, he saw a sight that touched him deeper than would the most beautiful Nature picture in the world,—a schooner making for the island. They had seen his smoke-pillar at a great distance and altered their course to his rescue. So he went away, leaving behind him a terrible memory as of the ravages of some unthinkable monster whose visit had changed, not only the face of Nature, but all the habits and customs of the island-folk.

IX

A SUBMARINE EARTHQUAKE

THERE was a delicate tint of green over all the sky instead of its usual deep, steadfast blue. All around the horizon the almost constant concomitants of the Trade winds, fleecy masses of cumuli, were lying peacefully, their shape unaltered from hour to hour. Their usual snowy whiteness, however, was curiously besmirched by a shading of dirty brown which clung around their billowy outlines, giving them a stale appearance greatly at variance with the normal purity of these lovely cloud-forms. The afternoon sun, gliding swiftly down the shining slope of heaven toward the western edge of that placid sea, had an air of mystery about his usually glorious disc, a wondrous glow of unnameable tints that, streaming away from him into the clear firmament, encircled him with a halo of marvellous shades, all lacking the palpitating brightness usually inseparable from solar displays near the Equator. And over the sea-surface also was spread, as upon a vast palette, great splashes of colour, untraceable to any definite

source, mysterious in their strange beauty. At irregular intervals, across that silent expanse of peaceful limpidity, came, in stately onset, an undulating throb of ocean's heart,—a shining knoll of water one hundred leagues in length, but so mobile, so gentle in its gliding incidence, that it was beautiful as the heaving bosom of a sleeping naiad. The very silence, deep and solemn as that of the stellar spaces, was sweet,—a peaceful sweetness that fell upon the soul like the most exquisite music, and soothed as does a dreamless sleep.

And yet, in spite of the indescribable charm of that divine day, there was on board the solitary ship that gave the needed touch of human interest to that ocean Elysium a general air of expectancy, a sense of impending change which as yet could not be called uneasiness, and still was indefinably at variance with the more manifest influences that made for rest of mind and body. The animals on board, pigs and cats and fowls, were evidently ill at ease. Their finer perceptions, unbiassed by reasoning appreciation of Nature's beauties, were palpably disturbed, and they roamed restlessly about, often composing themselves as if to sleep, only to resume their agitated prowling almost immediately. Lower sank the sun, stranger and more varied grew the colour-schemes in sky and sea. Up from the Eastern horizon crept gradually a pale glow as of a premature dawn, the breaking of an interpolated day shed by some visitant sun

from another system. The moon was not yet due for six hours, so that none could attribute this unearthly radiance to her rising. Busy each with the eager questionings of his own perturbed mind, none spoke a word as the sun disappeared, but watched in suspense that was almost pain the brightening of this spectral glare. Suddenly, as if reflected from some unimaginable furnace, the zenith was all aflame. That fiery glow above turned the sea into the semblance of a lake of blood, and horror distorted every face. The still persisting silence now lay like the paralysis of a trance upon all, and an almost frantic desire for sound racked them to the core.

At last, when it seemed as if the tension of their nerves had almost reached the snapping point, there was an overwhelming sulphurous stench, followed by a muttering as of thunder beneath the sea. A tremendous concussion below the keel made the stout hull vibrate through every beam, and the tall masts quivered like willow twigs in a squall. The air was full of glancing lights, as if legions of fire-flies disported themselves. Slowly the vessel began to heave and roll, but with an uncertain staggering motion, unlike even the broken sea of a cyclone centre. Gradually that dreadful light faded from the lurid sky, and was replaced by a smoky darkness, alien to the overshadowing gloom of any ordinary tempest. Strange noises arose from the deep, not to be compared with any of the manifold voices of the

ocean so well known to those who do business in great waters. And the myriad brightnesses which make oceans' depths so incomparably lovely throughout the tropical nights were all gone. All was dark beneath as above. Not only so, but those anxious mariners could feel, though they could not see, that while the atmospheric ocean was calm almost to stagnation, the hidden deeps under them were being rent and disintegrated by such an unthinkable storm as the air had never witnessed. The fountains of the great deep were broken up, but the floods issuing therefrom were of cosmic flame, able to resolve even that immensity of superincumbent ocean into its original gases and change the unchangeable.

Tossing helplessly upon that tortured sea, face to face with those elemental forces that only to think of makes the flesh shrink on the bones like a withered leaf, the men suffered the passage of the hours. What was happening or was about to happen they could only dimly imagine. They could but endure in helplessness and hope for the day. Yet their thoughts would wander to those they loved, wondering dimly whether the catastrophe apparently impending was to be universal and the whole race of man about to be blotted out,—whether the world were dying. What *they* suffered could not be told, but the animals died. Perhaps the scorching heat-waves which continually arose, making mouths and nostrils crack like burnt leather, and cauterising taste and

smell as if with the fumes of molten sulphur, had slain the beasts. The discovery of this ghastly detail of the night's terrors did not add much to their fears. It could not; for the mind of man can only contain a limited amount of terror, as the body can only feel a limited amount of pain, which is something to be deeply thankful for.

Shortly after midnight there was a deafening uproar, a hissing as of the Apocalyptic Star being quenched, and immediately the gloom became filled with steam, an almost scalding fog, through which as through a veil came a red sheen. At the same time a mighty swell swept toward them from east to west, striking the ship full in the stem. Gallantly she rose to the advancing wall of water until she seemed upreared upon her stern, but in spite of her wonderful buoyancy a massive sea broke on board, clearing the decks like a besom of destruction. Down the receding slope of this gigantic billow she fled, as if plunging headlong to the sea-bed, and before she had time to recover herself was met by another almost as huge. Clinging for life to such fragments as still held on the clean-swept decks, the crew felt that at last all was over. But the good ship survived the third wave, being then granted a brief respite before another series appeared. This allowed all hands a breathing space, and an opportunity to notice that there was a healthier smell in the air, and that the terror-striking noises were fast dying away. When the next set of rollers came thundering along they

were far less dangerous than before, nor, although they made a clean breach over the much-enduring ship, were they nearly as trying to the almost worn-out crew. And now, breaking through the appalling drapery that had hidden the bright face of the sky, suddenly shone the broad smile of the silver moon. Like the comforting face of a dear friend, that pleasant sight brought renewed hope and vigour to all. Again the cheery voices of the officers were heard, and all wrought manfully to repair the damage done by the terrible sea. One by one the glittering stars peeped out as the gloomy canopy melted away, revealing again the beautiful blue of the sky. A gentle breeze sprang up, but for awhile it was only possible to lay the ship's head approximately on her course, because the compasses were useless. The needles had temporarily lost their polarity in the seismic disturbance that had taken place beneath them. But that was a small matter. As long as the celestial guides were available, the navigators could afford to wait until, with the rest of Nature's forces, magnetism regained its normal conditions. So, during the energetic labours of the men, the morning quickly came, hailed by them as a sight they had never again expected to see. And what a dawn it was. Surely never had the abundant day been so delightful, the heaven so stainless, the air so pure. All the more because of the extraordinary contrast between sky and sea ; for old ocean was utterly unlike any sea they had ever before sailed upon. As far as

the eye could reach the surface was covered with floating pumice, so that the vessel grated through it as if ploughing over a pebbly beach. Wherever the water could be seen it was actually muddy, befouled like any ditch. Dead fish, floating and distorted, added to the ugliness of what overnight was so beautiful. Most pathetic of all, perhaps, upon that dead sea was the sight of an occasional spot of white, a tiny patch of ruffled feathers floating, that had been one of the fearless winged wanderers who add so much to the beauty of the sea, its joyous life quenched by the poisonous fumes of the submarine earthquake.

X

THE SILENT WARFARE OF THE SUBMARINE WORLD

All imaginative minds are inevitably impressed by the solemn grandeur of the sea. Some shudder at its awful loneliness, its apparent illimitability, its air of brooding, ageless mystery in calm. Others are most affected by its unchainable energy, the terror of its gigantic billows, its immeasurable destructiveness in storms. Yet others, a less numerous class, ponder over its profundities of rayless gloom and uniform cold, where incalculable pressures bear upon all bodies, so that cylinders of massive steel are flattened into discs, and water percolates through masses of metal as though they were of muslin. But there is yet another aspect of the oceanic wonders that engages the meditations of comparatively few, and this is perhaps the most marvellous of them all.

Placid and reposeful, tempest-tossed or current-whirled, the unchangeable yet unresting surface of the ocean reveals to the voyager no inkling of what is going on below its mobile mask, and even

when furrowed deepest by the mighty but invisible ploughshare of the storm, how slight is the effect felt twenty feet deep. Yet in those soundless abysses of shade beneath the waves a war is being incessantly waged which knows no truce, ruthless, unending, and universal. On earth the struggle for existence is a terrible one, exciting all our sympathies when we witness its pitilessness, being ourselves by some happy accident outside the area. Nature, "red in tooth and claw," weeding out the unfit by the operation of her inexorable laws, raises many a doubting question in gentle souls as to why all this suffering should be necessary. They see but a portion of the reversed pattern woven by the eternal looms. But the fauna of the land are by an enormous majority herbivorous, mild in their habits, and terrified at the sight of blood. Even the carnivora, fierce and ravenous as are their instincts, do not devour one another except in a few insignificant and abnormal cases, such as wolves driven mad by starvation. Much less do they eat their own offspring, although there are many instances of this hideous appetite among the herbivores, which are familiar to most of us.

In striking contrast to these conditions, the tribes of ocean are all devourers of each other, and, with the exception of the mammalia and the sharks, make no distinction in favour of their own fruit. One single instance among the inhabitants of the sea furnishes us with a variation. The halicore, dugong, or manatee (*Sirenia*), now nearly

extinct, are, without doubt, eaters of herbage only. This they gather along the shores whose waters are their habitat, or cull from the shallow sea bottoms. For all the rest, they are mutually dependent upon each other's flesh for life, unscrupulous, unsatisfied, and vigorous beyond belief. "Væ Victis" is their motto, and the absence of all other food their sole and sufficient excuse. Viewed dispassionately, this law of interdependence direct is a beneficent one in spite of its apparent cruelty. Vast as is the sea, the fecundity of most of its denizens is well known to be so great that without effective checks always in operation it must rapidly become putrid and pestilential from the immense accumulation of decaying animal matter. As things are, the life of a herring, for instance, from first to last is a series of miraculous escapes. As ova, their enemies are so numerous, even their own parents greedily devouring the quickening spawn, that it is hard to understand how any are overlooked and allowed to become fish. Yet as fry, after providing food for countless hordes of hungry foes, they are still sufficiently numerous to impress the imagination as being in number like the sands of the sea. And so, always being devoured by millions, they progress towards maturity, at which perhaps one billionth of those deposited as ova arrive. This infinitesimal remnant is a mighty host requiring such supplies of living organisms for its daily food as would make an astronomer dizzy to enumerate. And every one is fat and vigorous; must be, since

none but the fittest can have survived. Their glittering myriads move in mysteriously ordered march along regular routes, still furnishing food for an escort of insatiable monsters such as whales, sharks, etc.; while legions of sea-fowl above descend and clamorously take their tiny toll. In due season they arrive within the range of man. He spreads his nets and loads his vessels, but all his spoils, however great they may appear to him, are but the crumbs of the feast, the skimmings of the pot.

This marvellous system of supply and demand is, of course, seen in its highest development near land, or at any rate where the bed of the sea is comparatively near the surface, as on the Banks of Newfoundland, the Agulhas Banks, and many others. But in the deepest waters of the ocean, far from any shore, there are immense numbers of swift predatory fish, such as the bonito, the dolphin (*coryphæna*), and the albacore. Mammalia also, like the porpoise, grampus, and rorqual, require enormous supplies of fish for their sustenance, and never fail to find them. As we ascend the scale of size the struggle becomes majestic—a war of Titans, such as no arena on earth has seen since the Deluge. The imagination recoils dismayed before the thought of such a spectacle as is afforded by the gigantic cachalot descending to the murky depths where in awful state the hideous Kraken broods. No other name befits this inexpressible monster as well as the old Norse epithet bestowed

in bygone days upon the greatest of the mollusca by terrified fisher-folk of Scandinavia. Vast, formless, and insatiable, he crouches in those fathomless silences like the living embodiment of sin, an ever-craving abysmal mouth surrounded by a Medusa-like web of unresting arms. His enormous flaccid bulk needs a continual holocaust to supply its flood of digestive juices, and that need is abundantly supplied. Then comes the doughty leviathan from above, and in noiseless majesty of power, disdaining subterfuge, rushes straight to the attack, every inch of his great frame mutely testifying to the enormous pressure of the superincumbent sea. Sometimes, stifling for air, the whale rises to the surface dragging upward his writhing prey, though almost as bulky as himself. In his train follow the lesser monsters eager for their share, and none of the fragments are lost.

But see the grampus hurl himself like some flying elephant into the "brown" of a school of scared porpoises. In vain do they flee at headlong speed anywhither. The enemy pursues, he overtakes, he swallows at a gulp, even as do his victims the lesser creatures upon which they fatten in their turn. So with the huge mackerel, which seamen call the albacore, although as far as one can see there is no difference between him and the tunny of the Mediterranean but in size. What havoc he makes among a school of his congeners the bonito! A hungry lion leaping into the midst of a flock of deer will seize one, and retire to devour it quietly.

But this monster clashes his jaws continually as he rushes to and fro among the panic-stricken hosts, scattering their palpitating fragments around him in showers. In like manner do his victims play the destroyers' part in their turn. Yonder flight of silvery creatures whose myriads cast a dense shade over the bright sea are fleeing for life, for beneath them, agape for their inevitable return, are the serried ranks of their ravenous pursuers. Birds intercept the aerial course of the fugitives, who are in evil case indeed whithersoever they flee. But descending the scale, we shall find the persecuted *Exoceta* also on the warpath in their thousands after still smaller prey.

Time would fail to tell of the ravages of the swordfish, also a mackerel of great size and ferocity, who launches himself torpedo-like at the bulky whale, the scavenger-shark, or a comrade, with strict impartiality. And of the "killer" whale, eater of the tongue only of the mysticetus; the thresher-shark, aider and abettor of the killer; or the sawfish, who disembowels his prey that his feeble teeth may have tender food. Their warfare knows no armistice; they live but to eat and be eaten in their turn, and as to eat they must fight, the battle rages evermore. The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty, but they are peaceful compared with the sombre depths of the sea.

XI

AN EFFECT OF REFRACTION

All hands were asleep. The conduct of the watch on deck, though undoubtedly culpable, had just this excuse, that the ship was far out of the track of other vessels, and lying lapped in a profound calm, still as a ship can ever be upon the ocean's never-resting bosom. It was my trick at the wheel, and although I had certainly been asleep like the rest of my shipmates, I presently found myself wide awake, as if an unfelt breath had in an instant swept my brain clear of those bewildering mist-wreaths that usually hinder the mind on its return to tangible things from its wanderings in the realms of the unknown. Instinctively I glanced aloft, where the sails hung flatly motionless, except for an occasional rippling flap, soft-sounding as the wing of a mousing owl, as the vessel swayed dreamily over the caressing swell. Overhead, the bright eye of Aldebaran looked down with a friendly gaze, but not an air even of the faintest was there to stir the slumbering keel. On the companion, a few feet away,

the shapeless form of the mate was dimly discernible, as in some incomprehensible tangle of limbs he lay oblivious of his surroundings. Through the open after-leaf of the cabin skylight came the close, greasy-smelling reek of the little den below. The useless compass answered my inquiring peep with a vacant stolidity, as if it were glued to the bottom of its bowl. Only the clock seemed alive and watchful, telling me that for still another hour I must remain at my post, although my presence there was the merest formality.

So I turned my thoughts listlessly in the direction of the sailor's usual solace during long spells of lonely watch—the building of airy visions of shore delights, when, the long voyage over, I should be free once more for a short time with a little handful of fast-disappearing gold wherewith to buy such pleasures as I could compass. As I thus dreamed, the heavy minutes crawled away on leaden-shod feet, while the palpable silence enwrapped me, almost making audible the regular rhythm of my heart. But gradually out of this serene outward and inward quiet there stole over me a nameless sense of fear, why or of what I had no idea. Nay, I hardly recognised this benumbing stealthy change in the calm normal flow of my being *as* fear. It was an indefinite alteration of all my faculties from healthy restful regularity to a creeping stagnation, as of some subtle poison disintegrating my blood and turning it into chilly dust. All the moisture of

my body seemed evaporating, my skin grew tighter, and my breath came in burning gasps that scorched my nostrils and throat. Yet, while this disabling of all my physical constituents was progressing, my mind was actively rebelling against the mysterious paralysis of its usually willing co-operators. Eagerly, fiercely, it demanded a reason, urged to instant action of some kind. Then, still in the same fateful, hasteless manner, my terror took a more definite shape. It, whatever was thus sapping my most vital forces, was behind me I felt it; I realised it; but what or who or how it was I could not or dared not imagine. Dimly I dwelt upon what I felt ought to be certain, that only about six feet of clear deck separated me from the vacant plane of the sea, but that certainty would not appear sure, as it ought to have done.

At last, by what seemed to me a superhuman effort of will, I summoned all my resources and turned my body round. There lay the sleeping sea, besprinkled all over with reflections of innumerable stars that shone scarcely less brilliant on the smooth face of the deep than they did in the inscrutable dome above. But among those simulated coruscations lay what looked like the long straight folds of a shroud. Broadening as it neared me, it faded away before its skirts reached the ship. My dry, aching eyeballs followed its pallid outlines horizonwards until at that indefinable limit where sea and sky seem to meet my fear took shape. There in the blue-black heaven, its

chin resting on the sea margin, glared a gigantic skull, perfect in all its ghastly details, and glowing with that unearthly light that only emanates from things dead. Yet the cavernous openings of that awful visage, deep within their darkness, showed a lurid suggestion of red that burned and faded as if fed from some hidden furnace beyond. This horrible apparition, so utterly at variance with the placid loveliness of its setting, completed my undoing. I actually felt thankful for its appalling hideousness as the sense that my endurance limit was reached came upon me. With a feeling of unspeakable gratitude and relief, I felt my parched-up bones melt, my whole framework collapsed, and I sank slowly to the deck, all knowledge fading like the last flicker of an exhausted lamp. But with the last gleam of sight I saw the Thing, elongated out of all proportion, suddenly snap the unseen ligament that bound it to the horizon. And immediately, some distance above, the sweet cool face of the lovely moon shone full-orbed, to commence her triumphal march across the sky. Then for an age I died.

By slow, painful stages life returned to me, as if the bewildered spirit must creep and grovel through obscene tunnels and tortuous grooves of interminable length before it could again reanimate the helpless tabernacle awaiting it. But so great had been the shock, so complete the disorganisation of all my powers, that for what seemed hours after I became fully conscious again, I was

unable to raise an eyelash. The same profound peace still reigned, not a sound, hardly a movement of the vessel. Slowly my eyes unclosed. I lay in a lake of moonlight streaming from the radiant globe sailing up the blue, now well advanced in her stately progress among the paling stars. As I looked up at the splendid satellite I wondered vaguely how I could ever have connected such a well-beloved object with the brain-withering terror of the immediate past. The problem was beyond me, never an acute reasoner at the best of times, but now mentally palsied by what I had undergone. While I still lay in sentient inability to move I heard the mate rise to his feet with a resounding yawn. The familiar noise broke the spell that held me. I rose to my feet involuntarily and peered in at the clock, which was on the stroke of four. "Eight bells, sir," I said, but in a voice so harsh and strange that the officer could not believe his ears. "What's that?" he queried wonderingly. I repeated the words. He rose and struck the bell, but came aft immediately he had done so and peered into my face as if to see who it was. "Ain't ye well?" he asked. "Y' look like a cawpse." I made some incoherent reply, upon which he said quickly, "Here, go for'ard 'n turn in, 'relse I'm damned if ye won't be sick." Listlessly I answered "Ay, ay, sir," and shambled forward to my stuffy bunk. My shipmates, heavy with sleep, took no notice of me, and I turned in, to lie tossing feverishly,

every sinew in my body vibrating with pain so as to be almost unbearable. A long spell of what I suppose was brain fever followed, during which the terrible vision of that middle watch was re-enacted a thousand times with innumerable fantastic additions. Out of that weary waste of life I emerged transformed from a ruddy, full-faced youth into a haggard, prematurely old man, while nothing but my stalwart physique enabled me to survive. For the rest of the voyage my shipmates looked upon me with awe, as upon one who had made a fearsome voyage into the unseen world lying all around us, and been permitted to return wise beyond the power of mortal speech to express. But my silence upon the subject was only because I really had nothing to tell. Whence came that marrow-freezing fear I shall never know, or why. What I *saw* was simply such a grotesque distortion of the moon's disc as is often witnessed in low latitudes, when either sun or moon rising appears to have the lower limb glued to the horizon for quite an appreciable time, while fragments of mist or cloud passing over the luminous and elongated face cause strange patterns to appear upon it. And when suddenly the connection seems to break, the luminary apparently springs several degrees at a bound into the clear sky above. Just an effect of refraction—nothing more.

XII

A WAKING NIGHTMARE

Curious indeed was the freak of fortune which, before I was thirteen years old, threw me like a frond of drifting seaweed upon one of the scattered cays of the Mexican Gulf. About the manner of my arrival I propose to say nothing here ; sufficient for present purposes to note that I was entirely alone upon that desolate patch of sand, hardly worthy of the name of islet, its very existence as a fragment of dry land dependent upon a bristling barrier of black boulders that bared their ravening fangs at every ebb. When the tide was up their position was solely marked by long lines of snowy breakers whose magnitude, accumulated by a protracted struggle shorewards over the vast outlying coral banks, was enormous,—so huge, in fact, that it was seldom possible, even when standing upon the apex of the islet, to see the horizon line, which stretched its perfect circle all around.

The defending fringe of jagged rocks formed by no means a continuous barrier. In fact it was more properly a series of parallels sufficiently

separated to have admitted small vessels between them, should the turbulent swell ever be quiet enough to permit such daring navigation. At one point a sort of causeway ran seaward some hundreds of feet at right angles to the beach. The crags of which this was composed were bared at half ebb, but from their tops one could in places look down into blue hollows where no bottom could be seen. Except when the wind was high, this ridge, though exceedingly difficult to traverse, from its broken character, was protected from battering seas. Lying, as it did, so much nearer the land, and in a different direction to the other barriers, it was sheltered by them to such an extent that only upon rare occasions was it swept from end to end by a lingering, lolloping swell that did not break.

Driven by that same pitiless necessity that had compelled me to ferret out the means of existence somehow since I reached my tenth year, it was no long time before I discovered that this rugged spur was the best place for fishing, especially with regard to crustacea, because a multitude of fish inhabited the irregular cavities of the reef beneath. And since I had water in abundance, a 400-gallon tank full having washed ashore from the wreck, while of biscuit and fishing-tackle there was also some store, I spent a good deal of my time upon the uneven pathway formed by this natural pier. Contenting myself with small bait cut from some luckless baby octopus I always waylaid at starting,

I was untroubled by fish too large for my immature strength, though on several occasions I only just succeeded in tearing half the palpitating body of my catch out of the eager jaws of some monster that rushed at him as he made his involuntary journey upwards.

Although so young, I was fairly seasoned to alarms and not at all nervous, which was as well, for if I had been I should probably have died of fright during the first night of my stay on the islet. But there was one inexplicable noise that always made me feel as if I had swallowed a lump of ice accidentally when I heard it. Even while on board the ship I never felt easy about it, the less so because I could never find an explanation of its origin. It sounded as if some giant had smitten the sea flatly with a huge paddle, or, still more, as if an extra large whale were "lob-tailing"—*i.e.* poised in the water head downwards, and striking deliberate blows upon its surface with his mighty flukes. This is a favourite habit with the larger cetacea, but only in the daytime, although I did not then know of it. The noise which scared me, however, was only heard at night, when, with a calm sea and not a breath of wind stirring, it assailed my ears like a summons from the unseen world. For this cause alone I was always glad to see the blessed daylight flooding the sky again.

Several days wore away uneventfully enough, and I was getting quite inured to silence and solitude, when it befell that the ebb came late in

the afternoon. By the slant of the sun I judged it must be somewhere about five o'clock when I climbed out along the slippery causeway to my favourite spot—a smooth hollow in the crest of a great boulder, from which comfortable perch I could look down on either side into deep, blue water. Here I seated myself cosily, and soon hauled up a dozen or so of sizable fish. Then, having ample provision, I rolled up my line, and lounged at ease, sleepily surveying the unspeakable glories of the sunset. Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, but the time slipped away unnoticed by me, till suddenly I started up, every nerve tingling with fear at the sound I so much dreaded somewhere very close at hand. I trembled so violently that I could not go back just yet; indeed, I could not stand, but sank into my stony seat. At that moment I turned my head to the right, and saw rising out of the water apparently quite slowly a hideous shape, if shape it could be said to possess any. In the gathering gloom it appeared almost like a gigantic bat as far as its general outline could be seen, but I never heard of a water-bat. For quite an appreciable space it hung in the quiet air, changing all the placid beauty of the evening into brain-benumbing horror for me; then with an unfolding movement it fell upon the glassy surface, producing the awe-inspiring sound I had so often shuddered at, its volume augmented tenfold by its nearness. Like some fascinated bird, I remained motionless, staring at

the rapidly smoothing spot where the awful thing had disappeared. Then suddenly the sea at my feet became all black, and out of its depths there arose close at my side a monster that was the embodied realisation of my most terrified imaginings. Its total area must have been about 200 square feet. It was somewhat of a diamond shape, with a tapering, sinewy tail about as long again as its body. Where I judged its head to be was a convex hollow, which opened widely as it rose, disclosing rows of shining teeth, set like those of a human being. At each side of this gulf rose a spiral horn about two feet long, looking like twisted whalebone, and guarding the eyes which lay between them. Oh, those eyes! Though not much more than twice as large as a horse's, as they glared through the wide slits within which they festered the ruddy sheen of the sunset caught them, making them glow bloodily with a plenitude of ghastly ferocity that haunts me yet. And on either side of the thing undulated gigantic triangular wings, raising its mass into the air with noiseless ease.

All this and more I saw in the breathless space of its ascent; then it hung between me and heaven, the livid corrupt-looking corrugations of its underside all awork, as it seemed, to enfold my shrinking flesh. Those fractions of a second, stretched into hours, during which my starting pupils photographed every detail of the loathsome beast, passed away at last, and it descended slantingly over me. Then amidst a roar of water in my ears the dark-

ness swallowed me up, and I knew no more. I am inclined to think that I owe my life to the trance-like state into which I had fallen, for although it appeared a frightfully long time before I saw the sweet evening light again, I was not nearly so exhausted as I have been on other occasions, when compelled to take a long dive. But after I had scrambled up on to the rock again, wondering to find myself still alive, such a recurrence of over-mastering fear seized me that it was all I could do to crawl crab-wise over the stony pinnacles back to the sand again. My strength only held out until I had reached a spot above high-water mark. There I subsided into blissful unconsciousness of all things, and knew no more until a new day was far advanced, and the terror of the previous night only a distressing memory apparently of some previous stage of existence. Years afterwards I learned that the hideous thing which had thus scared me almost to death was one of the *raiidæ*, or skate tribe. Locally it is known as the alligator guard, or devil fish, and, truly, its appearance justifies such an epithet. It is apparently harmless to man, but why, alone among the Cephalopteridæ, it should have the curious habit of taking these nocturnal leaps out of water is a mystery.

XIII

THE DERELICT

She had been a staunch, well-found wooden barque of about 800 tons, English built, but, like so many more of our sturdy old sailing ships, in the evening of her days she had been bought by the thrifty Norwegians. She bore on her ample stern the faded legend, *Olaf Trygvasson, Trondhjem.* Backwards and forwards across the North Atlantic to Quebec in summer, and to the Gulf Ports in winter, she had been faithfully drogueing timber for them for several seasons, her windmill-pump steadily going and the owners' profits accumulating.

This last voyage, however, had been unfortunate from its commencement. To the serious annoyance of Trygvasson and Company, no outward freight was obtainable, while the passage was half as long again as it should have been. A cargo was secured at last in Pensacola, with which not only was her capacious hold crammed, but the whole deck fore and aft as high as the shearpoles was piled with the balks, so that from the fore-

castle-head to the taffrail she was flush—a wind-swept stretch of slippery uneven planks with just a hole left here and there for the hard-bitten mariners to creep down to their darksome dens below. They were hardly clear of the harbour when one of those hurricane-like squalls so common to the Florida Gulf burst upon her, tearing a whole suit of sails from the yards and stays and sending them fleeting to leeward like fluttering clouds of spindrift. Then gale after gale buffeted her with unrelenting severity, treating the stolid, long-suffering crew with persistent cruelty as they crept wearily about the bitter eminence of the deck-load or clung half-frozen to the yards wrestling with the crackling ice-laden canvas. There were no complaints, for Scandinavian seamen endure the bitterest hardships with wonderful patience, growling — that well-used privilege of British seamen—being almost unknown among them.

At last there came a day when the wind grew more savage than they had yet borne,—wind with a wrathful tearing edge to it, as well as a force against which none of their canvas would stand for a moment. As a last resource they hove her to under a tarpaulin cut from the lazarette hatch, only two feet square, which they lashed in the mizen rigging. This steadied her for some hours, keeping her head to the wind fairly well, until a sea came howling down out of the grey hopelessness to windward and caught her on the weather

quarter. It twisted her up into the wind, wrenching off the rudder-head as you would behead a shrimp. Helpless, she fell off on the other tack just in time for a black mountain of solid water to hurl itself upon the bluff of her bow and sweep aft, tearing away with it boats, men, and all else that stood or lay in its way. When that great flood had subsided she was a silent ship. The only member of the crew left on deck was he who had been the helmsman, but was now only a heap of broken bones lying in a confused tangle just in the little space behind the wheel.

And then, being entirely at the mercy of the howling wind and scourging sea, the doomed ship was gradually stripped of her various furniture. Yards, released from position by the carrying away of the braces, battered and banged about until they and their supporting spars fell in ruin on the deckload and thundered alongside at the sturdy hull. While this dismantling was in progress, a small boy of about thirteen cowered in the murky cabin as far out of reach of the invading flood of salt water as he could get, wondering wearily when the clamour overhead would subside and somebody come below again. He was a London waif, who, unwanted and forlorn, had been for several years drifting about the world, the sport of every cross current of mischance until he had landed at Pensacola, where Captain Neilsen, of the *Olaf Trygvasson*, had in pity for his youthful loneliness given him a passage to London in

exchange for his services as cabin-boy. Although fairly well versed in seafaring—for he had been nearly two years at the poor business—he marvelled mightily at the uproar above and how it was he heard no voices. The noise of falling spars, the dull crashing blows of the sea, and the melancholy wailing of the wind were still so deafening that he was able as yet to console himself with the thought that puny human cries would be inaudible. But at last his suspense grew unbearable, and dropping into the water, which was well above his waist, he struggled on deck, to find himself sole representative of the crew, and the vessel derelict.

A horror of great loneliness fell upon him. Long experience of hardness had made him dry-eyed upon most occasions where tears would seem to be indicated in one so young, but something clutched his throat now that made him burst into a passionate fit of crying. In the full tide of it he suddenly stopped and screamed frantically, "Larsen! Petersen! Jansen!" but there was no voice nor any that answered.

The wind died away and the sea went down. There was a break in the pall of gloomy clouds, through which the afternoon sun gleamed warmly, even hopefully. But the brave and much-enduring old vessel was now water-logged, kept afloat solely by her buoyant cargo. She lay over at an angle of about 45°, the waves lap-lapping the edge of the deckload on the lee-side. Without motive-power or guidance, the sport of the elements, she

drifted helplessly, hopelessly anywhither, a danger to all navigation during the hours of darkness because almost invisible. And since she moved not except with the natural oscillation of the ocean, the rank parasitic life with which the sea teems fastened upon her hungrily wherever the water reached, so that in a short time she began to smell ancient and fish-like as Caliban.

Amidst that rapidly increasing growth of weed and shell, the lonely lad moved ghost-like, his sanity preserved as yet by the natural hopefulness of youth. But a fixed melancholy settled and strengthened upon him. He ate barely sufficient to support his frail life, although there was a sufficiency of coarse food and water for many days. At intervals he held long rambling conversations with himself aloud, peopling the solemn silence around him with a multitude of the creatures of his fancy. But mostly he crouched close down to the lee edge of the deckload, gazing for hours at a stretch into the fathomless blue depths beneath him ; for the weather had completely changed, the drift of the derelict having been southward into a region of well-nigh perpetual calm, apparently unvisited by storms or tenanted ships.

Day after day crawled by—how many the solitary child never knew, for he kept no reckoning. Longer and longer grew the dark festoons of dank weed around the battered hulk, while the barnacles, limpets, and other parasites flourished amazingly. In those calm waters whither she had drifted fish

of all shapes and sizes, usually unseen by mortal eyes, abounded. They swarmed around the weed-bedraped hull as they do about a half-tide rock in some quiet cove unvisited by man. As the calm persisted these marine visitants grew quainter and more goblin-like of shape, fresh accessions to their numbers continually reaching the surface. Pale eyes unfamiliar with the naked sunlight blinked glassily at the garish day out of hideous heads, and the motion of these denizens of the cold darkness below was sluggish and bewildered. The water became thick with greasy scum and the usually invigorating air took on a taint of decay, the stench of a stagnant sea. To the boy's disordered vision these gruesome companions grew more uncanny than the dreams of a madman, but still, though they daily multiplied until the water seemed alive with them, the strange fascination they exerted over him conquered his natural repugnance to slimy things all legs and eyes, that crawled horribly near. He could hardly spare sufficient time for such scanty meals as he needed, and must fetch from his hoard in an upper bunk on the weather-side of the cabin well out of reach of the encroaching, restless flood that invaded almost every other nook. Far into the night, too, under the stately stars, when the glazing sea was all aglow with living fires brightening and fading in long lines running in a multitude of directions and of a rich variety of colours, he remained, as if chained to the rail, staring steadfastly down at the

phantasmagoria below with eyes that scarcely blinked, though they ached and burned with the unreasoning intensity of his gaze. His babbling ceased. He spoke no word now, only brooded over the unhealthful waters like some paralysed old man. Voices came whispering strange matters in his ears, tales without beginning or end, incoherent fragments of mystery that wandered through the twilight of his mind and left no track of sense.

At last one night he crept wearily into his bunk for a morsel of food, meaning to bring it on deck and resume his unmeaning watching of the sea. But when he had put a biscuit in the breast of his jumper and tried to clamber back over the black flood that with sullen noise swept to and fro in the darkened cuddy, he found himself unable to move, much less to creep monkey-wise from point to point to the scuttle. So he lay back and slept, never heeding the weakness and want of feeling in his wasted limbs. When he awoke it was day, a long shaft of sunlight piercing an opening in the deck over his head and irradiating the gloomy den in which he lay. Suddenly there was a sound of voices, a cheery, hearty hail of "Anybody aboard this hooker? Hullo, derelict, ahoy!" He heard and smiled feebly. Such voices had been his constant companions for days, and although he felt dimly that they sounded different now, he was only too certain that they would change into malignant mockeries again directly. Then all was

still once more, save for the ceaseless wash of the waves against the weed-hung bulkheads of the cabin.

Outside upon the shining sea rode that most beautiful of all craft, a whale-boat, whose trim crew lay on their oars gazing curiously and with a certain solemnity upon the melancholy ruin before them. The officer in charge, a young lieutenant in the smart uniform of the American navy, stood in the stern-sheets pondering irresolutely, the undertones of his men falling unmeaningly upon his ears. At last he appeared to have made up his mind, and saying, "Pull two, starn three," put the tiller hard over to sheer the boat off to seaward, where the graceful shape of his ship showed in strong relief against the blue sky. But the sturdy arms had barely taken twenty strokes when, as if by some irresistible impulse, the officer again pressed the tiller to port, the boat taking a wide sheer, while the crew glanced furtively at his thoughtful face and wondered whatever he was about. Not until the boat headed direct for the wreck again did he steady the helm. "In bow, stand by to hook on!" he cried sharply, and as the boat shot along the lee-side, "unrow." "Jemmy," to his after-oarsman, "jump aboard and see if you can get below, forrard or aft. If she isn't bung full you might find something alive." "Ay, ay, sir," said Jemmy, a sturdy little Aberdonian, and in ten seconds he was scrambling over the slippery timbers towards the cuddy scuttle. Plump! and he disappeared down the dark hole. Two minutes' breathless suspense

followed, a solid block of silence, then a perfect yell of delight startled all the watchers nearly out of their wits. The dripping head of the daring Scot reappeared at the scuttle ejaculating in choicest Aberdeen : "Sen's anither han' here gin ye wull, sir. Ah've fun' a laddie leevin, an' thet's a'." In a moment another man was by his side, and the frail little bundle of humanity was passed into the boat with a tender solicitude beautiful to see in those bronzed and bearded men.

The lieutenant, in a voice choked with emotion, said, "Poor little chap! Somehow I felt as if I *couldn't* leave that ship. Give way, men ; he's so nearly gone that we must get him aboard sharp if we're going to save him after all." The crew needed no spur, they fairly made the boat fly towards the ship, while the officer, with a touch almost as gentle as a mother's, held the boy in his arms. When she arrived alongside the *Essex* everything was in readiness, the fact of a life being at stake having been noted a long way off. He was gently lifted on board and handed over to the doctor's care, while the crew were piped to gunnery practice and the dangerous obstruction of the derelict smashed into a mass of harmless fragments.

A few days of such unceasing care as a king might desire in vain, and the boy took firm hold on life again. But his youthful elasticity of spirit has never returned to him. A settled gravity has taken its place, remaining from the time when he kept his long and lonely vigil on the *Olaf Trygvasson*, derelict.

STUDIES IN
MARINE NATURAL HISTORY

XIV

SOME OCEANIC BIRDS

It is surely a matter for congratulation that the sentiment of mankind toward what we are pleased to call the lower animals is certainly, if slowly, tending in the direction of kinder and more merciful appreciation of them in nearly all their varieties as knowledge of them grows from more to more. As perhaps is but natural, this benevolent feeling is most strongly marked for birds, those feathered Zingari of the air whose blithe evolutions above are more envied by man than any other power possessed by the vastly varied members of the animal kingdom. In obedience to the growing demand for more intimate knowledge of birds and their habits whole libraries have been written, and still this literature increases; but while in this there is nothing to cavil at, one cannot help feeling that the marvellous life of the sea-birds has received far from adequate attention. Like so many other denizens of that vast and densely populated world of waters, their inaccessibility has hindered that close observation by trained

naturalists necessary in order to describe them as they deserve, while as yet no marine Richard Jefferies or White of Selborne has arisen. And this want is really to be wondered at, seeing how fascinating is the study of oceanic fauna, and remembering what a wealth of leisure is enjoyed by masters of sailing ships, which alone afford opportunities for observing the life of the sea-people.

Easily first in point of interest, as well as size, comes the lordly albatross, whose home is far south of the Line, and whose empire is that illimitable area of turbulent waves which sweep resistless round the world. Compared with his power of vision (sailors give all things except a ship the epicene gender "he"), the piercing gaze of the eagle or condor becomes myopic, unless, as indeed may be the case, he possesses other senses unknown to us by means of which he is made aware of passing events interesting to him occurring at incredible distances. Out of the blue void he comes unhasting on motionless pinions, yet at such speed that, one moment a speck hardly discernible, turn but your eyes away, and ere you can again look round he is gliding majestically overhead. Nothing in Nature conveys to the mind so wonderful an idea of effortless velocity as does his calm appearance from vacancy. Like most of the true pelagic birds, he is a devourer of offal, the successful pursuit of fish being impossible to his majestic evolutions. His appetite is enormous,

but his powers of abstinence are equally great, and often for days he goes without other nourishment than a drink of the bitter sea. At the Gargantuan banquet provided by the carcass of a dead whale, he will gorge himself until incapable of rising from the sea, yet still his angry scream may be heard as if protesting against his inability to find room for more provision against hungry days soon to follow. Despite his incomparable grace of flight when gliding through mid-air with his mighty wings outspread, when ashore or on deck he is clumsy and ill at ease. Even seated upon the sea his proportions appear somewhat ungainly, while his huge hooked beak seems too heavy to be upheld. On land he can hardly balance himself, and the broad silky webs of his feet soon become lacerated. Thus his visits to the lone and generally inaccessible rocks which are his breeding places are as brief as may be, since even conjugal delights are dearly purchased with hunger and painful restraint. A true child of the air, land is hateful to him, and only on the wing does he appear to be really at home and easeful.

The other members of the albatross family, who, with their chief (*Diomedea exulans*), are all classed by whalers under the ugly name of "gooneys," bear few of the majestic characteristics of their great head. The "mallymoke," which comes nearest to the albatross in size and beauty, is actually found north of the Line, a fact which severs this bird very widely from the albatross in

geographical range. Also, he is much livelier and more given to bustle fussily about. It costs him far less exertion to rise from the sea for flight than the unwieldy paddling run along the surface necessary to give sufficient impetus for raising the huge albatross, and consequently his alightings are much more frequent. But he is undoubtedly a beautiful bird, suffering only by comparison with the most splendid of all sea-fowl. A brown kind of albatross, with a dirty white beak, is very much in evidence south of 20° S., dropping continually into the turbulence of a ship's wake, and diving to considerable depths after scraps. Sailors call them Cape hens, for some misty reason which is never given. Among Southern birds they occupy much the same place in the esteem of those who are acquainted with them as does the sparrow at home.

A general favourite among seamen is the Cape pigeon, a pretty, busy little sea-bird about the size of a dove, but plumper, with a black head and an elaborate pattern in black and grey upon the white of its open wings. Around the stern of any passing ship large numbers of these fluttering visitors hover continually, their shrill cries and unwearying manœuvres contrasting pleasantly with the deep monotone made by the driving keel through the foaming sea. In common with most Southern sea-birds having hooked beaks, they are easily caught with hook and line, but will not live in captivity. Thoughtless passengers, wearied with what they call the tedium of the voyage, often

amuse themselves by shooting these graceful wanderers, although what satisfaction may be found in reducing a beautiful living thing to a useless morsel of draggled carrion is not easy to see. Occasionally a passing ship finds herself accompanied for a very short time by large flocks of small dove-coloured birds, who, however, do not seem to care much for the association with vessels so characteristic of sea-birds generally. These are known as whale-birds, probably because in the *mêlée* that goes on round the carcass of a dead whale they are never seen. Indeed they would stand but little chance of a meal among the hordes of larger and more voracious feasters. Mention must also be made of a peculiar and unprepossessing member of the petrel family, which looks much like a disreputable albatross, but is somewhat scarce. Known indifferently among whalemen as the "Nelly" or the "stinker," it seems probable that this bird is the Southern representative of the Arctic fulmar, which is abundant in the North. His chief peculiarity is his forwardness. No sooner does a whale give up the ghost than the Nelly boldly alights upon the black island-like mass and calmly commences to peck away at the firm blubber, while thousands upon thousands of other birds wait impatiently around, not daring to do likewise. Hence the terrible threat current in whaleships, "I'll 'light on ye like a stinker on a carcass."

At the bottom of the size scale, but in point of

affectionate interest second to none, comes the stormy petrel, or Mother Carey's chicken, a darling wee wanderer common to both hemispheres, and beloved by all sailors. With its delicate glossy black-and-brown plumage just flecked with white on the open wings, and its long slender legs reaching out first on one side and then on the other as if to feel the sea, it nestles under the very curl of the most mighty billows or skims the sides of their reverberating green abysses content as hovers the lark over a lush meadow. Howling hurricane or searching snow-blasts pass unheeded over that velvety black head. The brave bright eye dims not, nor does the cheery little note falter even if the tiny traveller must needs cuddle up close under the lee of some big ship for an occasional crumb. Only once have I known an individual cruel or senseless enough to harm a stormy petrel, and then the execrations of his shipmates fairly scared him into repentance. They seem to have solved the secret of perpetual motion, and often at night a careful listener may hear their low cry, even if he be not keen-sighted enough to see them flit beneath him.

Quite apart from these true oceanic nomads are the large class of sea-birds who, while gathering their food exclusively from the sea, never go to any great distance from land. This difference between them and the birds before mentioned is so strongly marked, that unobservant as sailors are generally, there are few who do not recognise the

vicinity of land upon catching sight of a man-o'-war bird, booby, gannet, or bo'sun. All these birds, whose trivial designations seem somehow more appropriate than the nine-jointed nomenclature of the schools, frequent for preference more accessible shores than the craggy pinnacles generally chosen by the bolder outfliers. Of the first-named, the "man-o'-war" or "frigate" bird, very little can be said to his credit. Michelet has rhapsodised about him in a curious effusion, of which one can only say that he seems to have confused three distinct birds under one head. Were this bird to receive an entirely appropriate title, it would be "pirate" or "buccaneer," since it is only upon the rarest occasions that he condescends to fish for himself, choosing rather to rob humbler birds of their well-earned prey. No sea-bird mounts so high as he, rising into the clear blue until only a black speck to the unassisted eye. Usually, however, he contents himself with a circling poise at an altitude of about 200 feet, whence he keeps steadfast watch upon all that transpires beneath. With his long tail dividing and closing like the halves of a pair of shears, and the brilliant scarlet pouch at his neck occasionally inflated, he waits, waits, until some fussy booby, like an overladen housewife hurrying home from market, comes flapping along towards her nest. Then the broad pinions suddenly close, and down like a meteor comes the marauder. With a wild shriek of terror booby disgorges her fish, but ere it reaches

the water out flash the black wings again, and with a grand swoop the assailant has passed beneath his frightened victim, caught the plunder, and soared skyward. In like manner these birds may sometimes be seen to catch a flying fish on the wing, a truly marvellous feat. It is, nevertheless, a pathetic sight to see them, when old age or sickness overtakes them, sitting in lonely dignity among the rocks where they breed, helplessly awaiting with glazing eyes and dropping plumage the tardy coming of deliverance.

As for the booby, whose contemptuous name is surely a libel, space is now far too brief to do anything like justice to its many virtues. In a number of ways it corresponds very closely with the manners of our domestic fowls, notably in its care of its brood, and utter change in its habits when the young ones are dependent upon it. Of stupidity the only evidences really noticeable are its indifference to the approach of generally dreaded dangers when it is drowsy. At night one may collect as many from their resting-places as can be desired, for they make no effort to escape, but look at their enemy with a full, steady eye wherein there is no speculation whatever. Numberless instances might be collected where the tameness, as well as the abundance, of boobies have been the means of preserving human life after shipwreck, while their flesh and eggs are by no means unpalatable. Of several other interesting members of the great family of oceanic birds we have now no room to speak, but hope to return to the subject later on.

XV

THE KRAKEN

NEVER, within the history of mankind, does there appear to have been a time when dwellers by the sea did not believe in some awful and gigantic monsters inhabiting that unknown and vague immensity.

Whether we turn to Genesis to find great sea-monsters first of created sentient beings, or ransack the voluminous records of ancient civilisations, the result is the same. What a picture is that of the Hindu sage in the Fish Avatar of Krishna, finding himself and his eight companions alone in their ark upon the infinite sea, being visited by the god as an indescribably huge serpent extending a million leagues, shining like the sun, and with one stupendous horn, sky-piercing.

In the brief compass of this chapter I do not propose to *réchauffer* any sea-serpent stories, ancient or modern. More especially because my subject is the Kraken, and while I hold most firmly that the gigantic mollusc which can alone be given that title is the *fons et origo* of all true

sea-serpent stories, it is with facts relating to the former that I have alone to deal. As might have been expected, all stories of sea-monsters have a strong family likeness, showing pretty conclusively their common derivation, with such differences as the locality and personality of the narrative must be held accountable for. But among sea-folk, as among all people leading lives in close contact with the elemental forces of Nature, legends persist with marvellous vitality, and so the story of the Kraken is to be found wherever men go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters.

Substantially the story is: that long low-lying banks have been discovered by vessels, which have moored thereto, only to find the supposed land developing wondrous peculiarities. Amid tremendous turmoil of seething waters, arms innumerable, like a nest of mighty serpents, arose from the deep, followed at last by a horrible head, of a bigness and diabolical appearance unspeakably appalling. Fascinated by the terrible eyes that, large as shields, glared upon them, the awe-stricken seamen beheld some of the far-reaching tentacles, covered with multitudes of mouths, embracing their vessel, while others searched her alow and aloft, culling the trembling men from the rigging like ripe fruit, and conveying them forthwith into an abysmal mouth where they vanished for ever.

Such a story, especially when embellished by professional story-tellers, has of course met with well-merited scepticism, but sight has been largely

lost of the fact that from very early times much independent testimony has been borne to the existence of immense molluscæ in many waters, sufficiently huge and horrific to have furnished a substantial basis for any number of hair-raising yarns. And having myself for some years been engaged in the sperm whale fishery, all over the globe, I now venture to bear the testimony of another eye-witness to the truth of many Kraken legends, however much they may have been, and are now, doubted.

To eager students of marine natural history, nothing can well be stranger than the manner in which, with two or three honourable exceptions, the sperm whale fishers of the world have "sinned their mercies." To them as to no other class of sea-farers have been vouchsafed not glimpses merely, but consecutive months and years of the closest intimacy with the secret things of old ocean, embracing almost the whole navigable globe. And when, unpressed for time, they have leisurely entered those slumbrous latitudes so anxiously avoided by the hurried, worried merchantman, how utterly have they neglected their marvellous opportunities of observation of the wonders there revealed. It may not be generally known that during long-persisting calms the sea surface changes its character. From limpid blue it becomes greasy and pale, from that health-laden odour to which the gratified nostrils dilate, and the satisfied lungs expand, there is a gruesome change to an unwhole-

some stench of stagnation and decaying things, such as the genius of Coleridge depicted when he sang :

> The very deep did rot; O Christ !
> That ever this should be !
> Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon the slimy sea.

Strangest of all the strange visitors to the upper world at such times is the gigantic squid, or cuttle-fish. Of all the Myriad species of mollusca this monster may fairly claim chief place, and neither in ancient or modern times have any excited more interest than he. Gazing with childlike fear upon his awe-inspiring and uncanny bulk, the ancients have done their best to transmit their impressions to posterity. Aristotle writes voluminously upon the subject, as he did about most things, but his cuttles are such as are known to most of us. Pliny leaves on record much concerning the Sepiadæ which is evidently accurate in the main, mentioning especially (lib. ix. caps. iv. and xxx.) one monster slain on the coast of Spain which was in the habit of robbing the salt-fish warehouses. Pliny caused the great head to be sent to Lucullus, and states that it filled a cask of fifteen amphoræ. Its arms were thirty feet long, so thick that a man could hardly embrace them at their bases, and provided with suckers, or acetabula, as large as basins holding four or five gallons. But those who have leisure and inclination may pursue the subject in the

works of Ælian, Paulinus (who describes the monster as a gigantic crab), Bartholinus, Athanasius Kircher, Athenæus, Olaus Magnus, and others. Pontoppidan, Bishop of Bergen, in his *Natural History of Norway*, has done more than any other ancient or modern writer to discredit reports, essentially truthful, by the outrageous fabrications he tells by way of embellishment of the facts which he received. Least trustworthy of all, he has been in this connection most quoted of all, but here he shall be mentioned only to hold his inventions up to the scorn they so richly deserve.

The gigantic squid is, unlike most of the cephalopoda, a decapod, not an octopod, since it possesses, in addition to the eight branchiæ with which all the family are provided, two tentacula of double their length, having acetabula only in a small cluster at their ends. This fact was noticed by Athanasius Kircher, who describes a large animal seen in the Sicilian seas which had *ten* rays, or branches, and a body equal in size to that of a whale ; which, seeing how wide is the range in size among whales, is certainly not over-definite. Coming down to much later days, we find Denys de Montfort *facile princeps* in his descriptions of the Kraken (*Hist. Nat. de Mollusc*s, tome ii. p. 284). Unfortunately, his reputation for truthfulness is but so-so, and he is reported to have expressed great delight at the ease with which he could gull credulous people. Still the best of his stories may be quoted, remembering that, as far

as his description of the monster is concerned, he does not appear to have exaggerated at all.

He records how he became acquainted with a master mariner of excellent repute, who had made many voyages to the Indies for the Gothenburg Company, by name Jean Magnus Dens. To this worthy, sailing his ship along the African coast, there fell a stark calm, the which he, even as do prudent shipmasters to-day, turned to good account by having his men scrape and cleanse the outside of the vessel, they being suspended near the water by stages for that purpose. While thus engaged, suddenly there arose from the blue placidity beneath a most "awful monstrous" cuttle-fish, which threw its arms over the stage, and seizing two of the men, drew them below the surface. Another man, who was climbing on board, was also seized, but after a fearful struggle his shipmates succeeded in rescuing him. That same night he died in raving madness. The mollusc's arms were stated to be at the base of the bigness of a fore-yard (*vergue d'un mât de misaine*), while the suckers were as large as ladles (*cueillier à pot*).

One who should have done better—Dr. Shaw, in his lectures—calmly makes of that "fore-yard" a "mizen-mast," and of the "ladles" "pot-lids," which may have been loose translation, even as the scraping "*gratter*" is funnily rendered "raking," as if the ship's bottom were a hayfield, but looks uncommonly like editorial expansion, which the story really does not require.

Another story narrated by Denys de Montfort relates how a vessel was attacked by a huge "poulp," which endeavoured to drag down vessel and all; but the crew, assisted by their patron, St. Thomas, succeeded in severing so many of the monster's arms from his body that he was fain to depart, and leave them in peace. In gratitude for their marvellous deliverance they caused an *ex voto* picture to be painted of the terrible scene, and hung in their parish church, for a testimony to the mighty power of the saint.

In the *Phil. Trans.* of the Royal Society (lxviii. p. 226), Dr. Schewediawer tells of a sperm whale being hooked (*sic*) which had in its mouth a tentaculum of the Sepia Octopodia, twenty-seven feet long. This was not its entire length, for one end was partly digested, so that when *in situ* it must have been a great deal longer. When we consider, says the learned doctor, the enormous bulk of the animal to which the tentaculum here spoken of belonged, we shall cease to wonder at the common saying of sailors that the cuttle-fish is the largest in the ocean.

In Figuier's *Ocean World* he quotes largely from Michelet, that great authority on the Mollusca, giving at length the latter's highly poetical description of the vast family of "murderous suckers," as he terms the cephalopoda.

In the same work, too, will be found a most matter-of-fact description and illustration of the meeting of the French corvette *Alecton* with an

immense calamary between Teneriffe and Madeira. This account was furnished by Lieutenant Bayer to the Académie des Sciences, and is evidently a sober record of fact. The monster's body was hauled alongside, and an attempt was made to secure it by means of a hawser passed round it, but of course, as soon as any strain was put upon the rope, it drew completely through the soft gelatinous carcass, severing it in two. The length of this creature's body was fifty feet. But M. Figuier is not satisfied; he says that even this account must be taken *cum grano salis*, so unwilling is he to believe in a monster that would evidently settle the great Kraken and sea-serpent question once for all.

Even Dr. Solander and Mr. Banks, after finding a cuttle six feet long floating upon the sea near Cape Horn, which was quite beyond all their previous experience, could not bring themselves to believe in the existence of any larger. So at the beginning of this century, while people had largely consented to accept the sea-serpent, they would have none of the Kraken or anything which might reasonably explain the persistence of evidence about him. But had these scientific sceptics only taken the trouble to interview the crews of the South Sea whalers, that sailed in such a goodly fleet from our ports during the first half of the century, they must have been convinced that, so far from the Kraken being a myth, he is one of the most substantial of facts, unless, indeed, they

believed that all whalemen were in a conspiracy to deceive them on that point.

Any thoughtful observer who has ever seen a school of sperm whales, numbering several hundreds, and understood, from the configuration of their jaws, that they must of necessity feed upon large creatures, can never after feel difficulty in believing that, in order to supply the enormous demand for food made by these whales, their prey must be imposing in size and abundant in quantity.

On my first meeting with the cachalot, on terms of mutual destruction, I knew nothing of his habits, and cared less. But seeing him, when wounded, vomiting huge masses of white substance, my curiosity was aroused, and when I saw that these masses were parts of a mighty creature almost identical in structure with the small squid so often picked up on deck, where it falls in its frantic efforts to escape from dolphins (*Coryphæna*), albacore, or bonito, my amazement was great. Some of these fragments were truly heroic in size.

Surgeon Beale, in his book on the sperm whale, only credits the cachalot with being able to swallow a man, but with all the respect due to so great a writer, I am bound to say that such masses as I have seen ejected from the stomach of the dying whale could only have entered a throat to which a man was as a pill is to us. We can, however, only speak of what we have seen, and perhaps Dr. Beale had never seen such large pieces ejected.

In an article in *Nature* of June 4, 1896, I

have described an encounter which I witnessed between a gigantic squid and a sperm whale, in the Straits of Malacca, which, as far as I am concerned, has settled conclusively the Kraken and sea-serpent question for me. This terrific combat took place under the full glare of a tropical moon, upon the surface of a perfectly calm sea, within a mile of the ship. Every detail of the struggle was clearly visible through a splendid glass, and is indelibly graven upon my mind. It was indeed a battle of giants—perhaps all the more solemnly impressive from being waged in perfect silence. The contrast between the livid whiteness of the mollusc's body and the massive blackness of the whale,—the convulsive writhing of the tremendous arms, as, like a Medusa's head magnified a thousand times, they wound and gripped about the columnar head of the great mammal,—made a picture unequalled in all the animal world for intense interest. The immense eyes, at least a foot in diameter, glared out of the dead white of the head, inky black, appalling in their fixity of gaze. Could we have seen more nearly, and in daylight, we should have also found that the sea was turned from its normal blue into a dusky brown by the discharge of the great cephalopod's reservoir of sepia, which in such a creature must have been a tank of considerable capacity. Each of those far-reaching arms were of course furnished with innumerable sucking discs, most of them a foot in diameter, and, in

addition to the adhering apparatus, provided with a series of claws set round the inner edges of the suckers, large as those of a grizzly bear. Besides the eight arms, there were the two tentacula, double the length of the arms, or over sixty feet long—in fact, about the length of the animal's body, and quite worthy of being taken for a pair of sea-serpents by themselves. But the whale apparently took no heed of the Titanic struggles of this enormous mollusc. He was busy wielding his mighty jaws, not in mastication, but in tearing asunder the soft flesh into convenient lumps for being swallowed. All around were numerous smaller whales or sharks, joining in the plentiful feast, like jackals round a lion. Every fisherman worth his salt knows how well all fish that swim in the sea love the sapid flesh of the cephalopoda, making it the finest bait known, and in truth it is, and always has been, a succulent dainty, where known, for mankind as well. But it is evident from the scanty number of times that the gigantic cuttle-fish has been reported, that his habitat is well beneath the surface, yet not so far down but that he may be easily reached by the whale, and also find food for his own vast bulk. Probably they prey upon one another. From what we know of the habits of those members of the family who live in accessible waters, it is evident that nothing comes amiss to them in the way of fish or flesh, dead or alive.

The Prince of Monaco, who is a devotee of

marine natural history, was fortunate enough to witness some bay whalers at Terceira early this year catching a sperm whale. He and his scientific assistants were alike amazed at seeing the contents of the whale's stomach ejected before death, but their amazement became hysterical delight when they found that the ejecta consisted of portions of huge cuttle-fish, as yet unknown to scientific classification. The species was promptly named after the Prince, *Lepidoteuthis Grimaldii*, and a paper prepared and read before the Académie des Sciences at Paris. So profoundly impressed was the Prince with what he had seen, that he at once determined to convert his yacht into a whaler, in order to become better acquainted with these wonderful creatures, so long known to the obtuse and careless whale-fishers. One interesting circumstance noted by the Prince was the number of circular impressions made upon the tough and stubborn substance of the whale's head, hard as hippopotamus hide, showing the tremendous power exerted by the mollusc as well as his inability to do the whale any harm.

But were I to describe in detail the numerous occasions upon which I have seen, not certainly the entire mollusc, but such enormous portions of their bodies as would justify estimating them as fully as large as the whales feeding upon them, it would become merely tedious repetition.

As I write, comes the news that an immense squid has just been found stranded on the west

coast of Ireland, having arms thirty feet in length, a formidable monster indeed.

In conclusion, it may be interesting to know that these molluscs progress, while undisturbed, literally on their heads, with all the eight arms which surround the head acting as feet as well as hands to convey food to the ever-gaping mouth; but when moving quickly, as in flight, or to attack, they eject a stream of water from an aperture in the neck, which drives them backwards at great speed, all the arms being close together. Close to this aperture is the intestinal opening, a strange position truly. Strangest, perhaps, of all is the manner in which some species grow, at certain seasons, an additional tentacle, which, when complete, becomes detached and floats away. In process of time it finds a female, to which it clings, and which it at once impregnates. It then falls off, and perishes. It is probable that the animal kingdom, in all its vast range, presents no stranger method than this of the propagation of species.

XVI

CONCERNING SHARKS

Among the most fascinating of natural history studies, but withal one of the most difficult, is that of the *Squalidæ*, or shark family. The plodding perseverance of German professors has furnished students with an elaborate classification of these singular creatures in all their known genera, but of their habits little is really known. A mass of fable has clustered round them, much of it surviving from very remote times, and added to periodically by people who might, if they would, know better. The reiteration of shark stories has in consequence resulted in more ignorant prejudice against the really useful *squalus* than has perhaps fallen to the lot of any other animal, although most observant people know how absurd are many of the popular beliefs about much better known creatures. Strangely enough, the detestation in which the shark is generally held is largely the fault of sea-farers. It never seems to occur to shore-going folk how few are the opportunities obtained by the ordinary sailor-man of studying

the manners and customs of the marine fauna. Merchant ships, even sailing vessels, must "make a passage" in order to pay, and, except when unfortunate enough to get becalmed for a long spell, are rarely in a position favourable to close observation of deep-sea fishes and their ways. Men-of-war, especially surveying ships, who spend much time in unfrequented waters, and are often stationary for weeks at a time, are in a much better plight, and give the eager student of marine natural history great facilities for closely watching the sea-folk. Yet those are seldom taken advantage of as they might be for the rectification of the abundant errors that are to be found in books that deal in a popular way with the life-histories of sea-monsters. The only class of mariners who have had, so to speak, the home life of the sea-people completely open to them, who for periods of time extending to three or four years were in daily contact with the usually hidden sources of oceanic lore, were the South Sea whalers, whose calling is now almost a thing of the past. But even they wasted their invaluable privileges most recklessly, the contributions which they have made to science being exceedingly trivial.

Thus it comes about that the very men who should have either verified or disproved the really stupid stories current concerning sharks have chosen instead to adopt them blindly, and have, therefore, for centuries been guilty of the most revolting cruelty towards these strange fish. In

this connection it is interesting to note the remote times in which shark legends arose. Aristotle, whose multifarious researches extended into so many fields of knowledge, furnishes us with almost the first recorded mention of the shark, and his designation of them is perpetuated in the scientific nomenclature of a very numerous species to-day, the *Lamiæ*. From another name for the same creature πρίστις, we get *Pristiophoridæ*, or saw-fish, a curious shark confounded by an enormous number of otherwise well-read people with sword-fish (*Xiphias*), which is really a huge mackerel with a keen bony elongation of the upper jaw. Lycophron has recorded that Hercules, in the course of his superhuman adventures, was swallowed by a shark (Κάρχαρος), in whose maw he remained for three nights (why not days as well?), thence being surnamed Trinox, or Trihesperides. Theophrastus, pupil of Aristotle and Plato, observes that the Red Sea abounds with sharks, a remark which is as true in our day as it was in his. The Hercules myth was doubtless founded upon the reports of some actual witnesses of the voracious habits of these insatiable monsters, magnified and distorted, as most natural events were in those days, by superstitious terror. Even down to the present year of grace most people believe that quite a moderate-sized *squalus* is capable of swallowing a man entire, in spite of the abundant ocular evidence to the contrary afforded them by the specimens in museums, whose jaws,

generally denuded of flesh, give a greater idea of their capacity than is warranted by the living creature. It is refreshing to find, however, that even in those dark ages for all kinds of animals such a judicial writer as Plutarch speaks a good word for this universally feared and detested fish. He says that in parental fondness, in suavity and amiability of disposition, the shark is not excelled by any other creature. Keen as is my desire to see tardy justice awarded to the shark, I should hesitate to endorse the eminent Greek's statement as far as the last two qualities are concerned. My long and close acquaintance with the *Squalidæ* does not furnish me with any evidence in their favour on either of these heads. But in parental affection they are only equalled by the *Cetacea*, no other fish having, as far as I am aware, any reluctance to devour its own offspring. Plutarch's testimony, however, speaks volumes for his powers of observation and courage of his opinions, for verily in it he is *contra mundum.* Oppian, having seen the body of a huge shark in the museum at Naples, voices in his fifth *Halieutic* the general feeling in his day by the following remarkable outburst: "May the earth which I now feel under me, and which has hitherto supplied my daily wants, receive, when I yield it, my latest breath. Preserve me, O Jupiter! from such perils as this, and be pleased to accept my offerings to thee from dry land. May no thin plank interpose an uncertain protection between

me and the boisterous deep. Preserve me, O Neptune! from the terrors of the rising storm, and may I not, as the surge dashes over the deck, be ever cast out amidst the unseen perils that people the abyss. 'Twere punishment enough for a mortal to be tossed about unsepulchred on the waves, but to become the pasture of a fish, and to fill the foul maw of such a ravenous monster as I now behold, would add tenfold to the horrors of such a lot."

Olaus Magnus, upon whom we may always depend for something startling and original both in prose and picture, exhibits to our wondering gaze an agonised swimmer rising half out of the sea with three ravenous dog-fish hanging to him as hounds to a stag. In the distance is a huge ray or skate (one of the same family, by the by) with a human face, intended probably for a kind of sea angel, towards which wondrous apparition the despairing wretch stretches forth his appealing arms. Coming down to mediæval times, Rondolet babbles of a shark, taken at Marseilles, in whose stomach was discovered the body of a man in complete armour, a tough morsel to swallow in more senses than one. He also tells of a shark accidentally stranded near the same port and lying upon the shore with mouth wide gaping. Into this inviting portal there entered a man accompanied by a dog. The venturesome pair roamed about the darksome cavern making all sorts of strange discoveries, finally emerging into the outer

air swelling with importance at having accomplished so curious a feat. Enlarging upon this most obvious "yarn," the learned Dr. Badham gravely remarks that it greatly strengthens the probability that the fish which swallowed Jonah was a shark (*Piscis anthropophagus*), but that he is quite certain it could not have been a whale, from the well-known smallness of the latter's gullet. Without commenting upon the Old Testament story, there can be no doubt whatever that in the cachalot, or sperm whale, we have a marine monster capable of swallowing Jonah and his companions of Tarshish at a gulp—I had almost said ship and all, such is the capacity of that vast cetacean's throat. But Dr. Badham, while posing as an eminent authority, further exposes his bountiful want of acquaintance with his subject by observing that the liver of a medium-sized shark will yield two tons and a half of oil! As it is a huge shark that will scale that much altogether, he must have imagined them to be even better supplied with liver than Mulvaney's hepatic Colonel—in fact, all liver and some over.

A very favourite shark fable is to the effect that these fish prefer negroes to Europeans as food. The inventor of this was probably Père Labat, a mediæval French li—, I mean historian. After enlarging upon it for awhile he proceeds to embellish it with the addition that the shark prefers Englishmen to Frenchmen, because their flesh is more sapid and juicy from being better nourished. That was

probably before the French acquired their reputation for cookery. Numberless variants of this fantastic fable are extant, all, without exception, as baseless as the original yarn from which they have lineally descended. The annals of the slave-trade have, as might be expected, produced a plentiful crop of shark stories, of which apparently only the untrue ones survive. It may perhaps be true that the fiendish flesh dealers on the "West Coast" really did surround themselves with a cordon of slaves when they went bathing in the sea, having relays ready to supply the places of those occasionally snatched away by the sharks. Highly improbable though, since it would have been so expensive. Little doubt can attach to the supposition that, with their instinct for offal so marvellously developed as it is, great numbers of sharks followed the slave-ships across the seas, from whose pestilential holds the festering corpses were daily flung. But when Pennant tells us that the slaving captains used to hang the body of a slave from yard-arm or bowsprit-end that they might be amused by the spectacle of sharks leaping twenty feet out of the sea and tearing the bodies to fragments, he is stating that which is not only grotesquely untrue, but manifestly absurd. Sharks do not leap out of water. In making this statement I am liable to be contradicted, as I have been before in the columns of the *Spectator*, but never, *nota bene*, except upon hearsay, or personal evidence that had grave elements of doubt about it. Sharks can of

course raise their bodies *partly* out of water by an upward rush, a supreme effort rarely made by a naturally and habitually sluggish fish ; but, after an experience among many thousands of sharks under the most varied conditions in all parts of the world where they abound, I repeat emphatically that it is impossible for a shark to raise his entire body out of water and seize anything suspended in the air. And anyone who has carefully watched one shark seizing anything in the water or on the surface will find it difficult to disagree with me.

One more "authority" and we will get to first-hand facts. Sir Hans Sloane, in a very particular account of the shark, remarkable in many respects for its accuracy, perpetrates the following :—"It has several ducts on the head filled with a sort of gelly, from which, being pressed by the water, issues an unctuous, *viscid*, slippery, and mucilaginous matter, very proper to make the fish very glib to sail the readier through the water. Most fish have something analagous to this." That any fish should secrete a lubricant, at once unctuous and viscid, for the purpose of accelerating its progress through the limpid element in which it lives, would be curious indeed were such a contradictory fact possible, but that Sir Hans Sloane should say so, when the most cursory acquaintance with his subject would have shown him the absurdity of such a statement, would be far stranger were it not for the evidence afforded by the *Phil. Trans.* of the wildest flights of imagination on the part of savants

even down to comparatively recent times. But probably enough space has been given to ancient fables about the shark.

The whole family of the *Squalidæ*, with the doubtful exceptions of the saw-fish (*Pristiophoridæ*) and the *Raiidæ*, or skates, are scavengers, eaters of offal. As such their functions, though humble, are exceedingly useful and important; for although the myriads of *Crustacea* are scavengers pure and simple, their united efforts would be ineffectual to keep the ocean breadths free from the pollution of putrefying matter, since the vast majority of them dwell upon the bottom of comparatively shallow waters. Now when the body of some immense sea-monster, such as a whale, is bereft of life and rapidly rots, it usually floats. Then the office of the sharks is at once apparent. The only large fish that feeds upon garbage, they are possessed of an enormous appetite, as well as a digestive apparatus that would put to shame that of the ostrich, who is popularly credited with a liking for such dainties as nails and broken glass for *hors d'œuvres*. The shark is ever hungry, and nothing, living or dead, comes amiss to his maw; but owing to the peculiar shape and position of his mouth it is only in rare instances that he is able to catch living prey, as, for instance, when the dog-fish of our coasts, a common species of shark hated by fishermen, gets among the nets enclosing a fine catch of herring or mackerel. Then the gluttonous rascal is in for a good time. Heedless of the flimsy

barrier of twine, he gorges to bursting-point upon the impounded school, and usually concludes his banquet by tearing great gaps in the net, incidentally allowing the rest of the prisoners to escape. It is therefore hardly a matter for surprise that the despoiled and exasperated toilers of the sea, when they do succeed in capturing a dog-fish, should wreak summary vengeance upon him by such fantastic mutilation as their heated fancy suggests. They have also some curious ideas that the erratic antics performed by a blind, finless, and broken-jawed dog-fish will frighten away his congeners; and, as the shark is almost universally disdained as food, this practice of dismembering them and returning them alive to the sea, *pour encourager les autres*, seems to the fishermen an eminently satisfactory one. Unfortunately for their theory, the fact is, that supposing a sound and vigorous shark to meet with one of his kind incapable of flight or fight, the hapless flounderer would be promptly devoured by his relative, doubtless with the liveliest gratification. The shark has no scruples or preferences. Whatever he can get eatable (from his liberal point of view) he eats: of necessity, since he bears within him so fierce a craving for food that he will continue to devour even when disembowelled, until even his tremendous vitality yields to such a wound as that. Hence his bad name as a devourer of human flesh. An ordinary man in the water is, as a rule, the most defenceless of animals; and even a strong swimmer

is apt to become paralysed with fear at the mere rumour of a shark being in his vicinity. If there be no shelter near, his nerveless limbs refuse their office, he floats or sinks with hardly a struggle, and the ravenous *squalus* finds in him not only an easy prey, but no doubt a most savoury morsel. This is no reason for suggesting that the shark prefers the flesh of *homo sapiens* to all other provender. As I have already said, his tastes are eclectic. Nay, it is highly doubtful whether he has any sense of taste at all. All experiences point to the contrary, for it is common knowledge that sharks will gobble up anything thrown overboard from a ship, from a corpse swathed in canvas to a lump of coal. This omnivorousness has been noticed in an able article published in *Chambers's Journal* many years ago, the writer putting forward as a plausible reason for it the number of parasites that infest the stomachs of these fish. In this, however, they are by no means singular, all fish harbouring a goodly number of these self-invited boarders, the shark certainly entertaining no more than the average.

The presence of any large quantity of easily obtainable food is always sufficient to secure the undivided attention of the shark tribe. When "cutting in" whales at sea I have often been amazed at the incredible numbers of these creatures that gather in a short space of time, attracted by some mysterious means from heaven only knows what remote distances. It has often occurred to us, when whaling in the neighbourhood of New

Zealand, to get a sperm whale alongside without a sign of a shark below or a bird above. Within an hour from the time of our securing the vast mass of flesh to the ship the whole area within at least an acre has been alive with a seething multitude of sharks, while from every airt came drifting silently an incalculable host of sea-birds, converting the blue surface of the sea into the semblance of a plain of new-fallen snow. The body of a whale before an incision is made in the blubber presents a smooth rounded surface, almost as hard as india-rubber, with apparently no spot where any daring eater could find tooth-hold. But, oblivious of all else save that internal anguish of desire, the ravening sea-wolves silently writhed in the density of their hordes for a place at the bounteous feast. Occasionally one pre-eminent among his fellows for enterprise would actually set his lower jaw against the black roundness of the mighty carcass, and, with a steady sinuous thrust of his lithe tail, gouge out therefrom a mass of a hundredweight or so. If he managed to get away with it, the space left presented a curious corrugated hollow, where the serrated triangular teeth had worried their way through the tenacious substance, telling plainly what vigorous force must have been behind them. But it was seldom that we permitted such premature toll to be taken of our spoil. The harpooners and officers from their lofty position on the cutting stage slew scores upon scores by simply dropping their keen-edged blubber spades upon

the soft crowns of the struggling fish, the only place where a shark is vulnerable to instant death. The weapon sinks into the creature's brain, he gives a convulsive writhe or two, releases his hold and slowly sinks, followed in his descent by a knot of his immediate neighbours, all anxious to provide him with prompt sepulture within their own yearning maws.

At such a time as this the presence of a man in the water, right in the midst of the hungry host, passes unnoticed by them as long as he is upon the surface and in motion. Among the islands, while engaged in the "humpbacked" whale fishery, the natives were continually in and out of the water alongside where the sharks swarmed innumerable, but we never saw or heard of one being bitten. And some of *those* sharks were of the most enormous dimensions—approaching a length of thirty feet and of a bulk almost equal to one of our whale-boats. With that unerring instinct for spoil characteristic of the sharks, they begin to congregate in these seas almost contemporaneously with an attack upon a whale by whale-fishers. Now, one of the most frequent experiences in this perilous trade is that of a "stove" boat, necessitating a subsequent sojourn in the sea unprotected—sometimes for hours. Under such circumstances—and they have many times fallen to my share—I am free to confess that I have always had a curious feeling about my legs as if they were much too long, and whenever

anything touched them a sympathetic thrill of apprehension would run up my spine; but my legs are still of the usual length. Nor did I ever hear of a man being attacked in the water at such times. In fact, it is an article of faith with whalemen that sharks have sufficient intelligence to know that the human hunters of the whale are busily providing a feast for them, and that therefore a truce is then rigidly observed between them; for, although the ravenous creatures cannot refrain from attempting to sample the blubber *in situ*, their opportunity arrives when the mountainous mass of reeking meat, stripped of its external coating of fat, is cut adrift from the ship's side and allowed to float away. Then do they attack it in their thousands, and in an incredibly short time reduce it to a cleanly picked skeleton, for even their prowess is not equal to devouring the enormous framework of bone. But what they are capable of in the way of feeding may be judged from the fact that a humpbacked whale of about eighty tons in weight, which sank, after we had killed him, in about ten fathoms of water and which we were unable to raise for six hours for want of suitable gear, was so reduced in size by the time we lifted him to the surface again as not to be worth towing to the ship. In those latitudes, *i.e.* among the South Pacific Islands, are, I believe, to be found the largest sharks in the world, certainly the largest of those voracious kinds that so ably fill the office of sea-scavengers. Very large

specimens of the basking shark, some nearly thirty feet long and of much greater girth than the ordinary ones, have been found in our own seas, but these unwieldy creatures are as harmless as whales, and quite as timid. There is a very circumstantial account in *Nature* of several years ago of a curious shark caught at Taboga Island, Gulf of Panama, by the crew of the Royal Italian corvette *Vettor Pisani*. When accurately measured it was found to be 8.9 metres long, and its greatest girth 6.5 metres. The mouth of this monster was at the point of its snout instead of beneath it, but the teeth were rudimentary and covered with membrane. So harmless was it that it afforded harbourage within its mouth to several *Remora*, a curious hanger-on of the shark family, of whom more presently. Dr. Günther classifies this very queer fish as *Rhinodon typicus*. Sharks of the size I have mentioned as abounding in the South Pacific have often seven rows of teeth ranked behind each other. Only the first row were erect, the others lay flat as if ready to replace a sudden loss of those in use. But, after watching their operations upon pieces of "kreng," I am bound to say that swallowing a man whole, even by the largest of them, appears to me an utterly impossible feat.

Another peculiarity of the shark is that their colossal bodies are built upon a framework of cartilage, not bone. This may possibly account for their complete recovery from the most funda-

mental injuries. I once caught an eight-feet-long shark in the North Atlantic whose appearance suggested nothing out of the common. But, having a desire to make one of those useless articles dear to sailors, a walking-stick of a shark's backbone, I went to the trouble of extracting the spine. I found to my amazement that in the middle of it there was not only a solid mass of bone of over a foot long, but it was at this place quite double the normal thickness. Further investigation revealed the fact that at some period of his career this creature had been transfixed by a harpoon which had torn out, nearly severing his body in two halves. Several of the ribs were re-knit and thickened in the same way. This splendid recuperative power renders the shark almost invulnerable, except, as before noticed, to a direct severing of the brain, or such a radical dismemberment as lopping off the tail.

Slothfulness is a distinctive feature of all the sharks. They are able to put on a spurt at times, but want of energy characterises them all. This habit reaches its climax in the *Remora*, to which allusion has already been made. As if in pursuance of a widely held opinion that lazy people are the most prolific inventors, this small *squalus* has evolved an arrangement on the top of his head whereby he can attach himself to any floating body and be carried along without effort on his part. All the functions are easily performed during attachment, and nothing short of doing

damage to the fish will dislodge him. It is fairly well known that the Chinese and East African folk have utilised the *Remora* for catching turtle in a most ingenious way. More energetic than any other sharks are the saw-fish, whose snouts are prolonged into a broad blade of cartilage, which is horizontal when the fish is swimming in a normal position, and has both its edges set with slightly curved teeth about an inch apart. The end of this formidable-looking weapon is blunt and comparatively soft, so that it is quite incapable of the feats popularly attributed to it of piercing whales' bodies, ships' timbers, etc. It attacks other fish by a swift lateral thrust of the saw beneath them, the keen edge disembowelling them. Then it feeds upon the soft entrails, which are apparently the only food it can eat, from the peculiar shape of its mouth. It has an enormous number of small teeth, sometimes as many as fifty rows in one individual, but they are evidently unfit for the rough duties required of teeth by the garbage-eating members of the family.

Another peculiarity which differentiates the *Squalidæ* from all other fish, and would seem to link them with the mammalia, is the way in which they produce their young. But here arise such diversities as to puzzle the student greatly; for some sharks are viviparous, bearing fifteen sharklets at once, that play about the mother in the liveliest manner, and are cared for by her with the utmost solicitude. At the approach of danger they all

rush to the parent and hurry down her throat, hiding in some snug chamber till their alarm has subsided, when they emerge again and immediately recommence their gambols. The pretty little blue and gold *Caranx* (pilot-fish) that is so faithful a friend and companion to the shark also hides at times in the same capacious retreat. That this is a fact cannot be disputed, since sharks have often been caught and cut open, and the lively prisoners taken from within. Upon several occasions I have witnessed this, and I once kept a family of a dozen for over a week in a tub of water, feeding them on scraps, until some busybody gave them to the cat and made her very unwell. I have also seen the young ones and the pilot left behind when a shark has been caught, their frantic leapings upward at their departing protector being quite a moving sight. Other sharks are ovo-viviparous, laying eggs over the hatching of which they watch and afterwards care for the young as tenderly as do the others. Another species pack their eggs in a sort of pouch as the skates do. This envelope contains all the nourishment necessary to the well-being of the young until they are able to provide for themselves, but the parent has no further concern with them. As instances of the intelligence of the shark many well-authenticated stories might be told did space permit, but two must suffice. While lying in the harbour of Tamatave every device we could conceive was put in practice in order to catch

some of the sharks with which those waters abounded, but none were successful, for they carefully avoided all bait attached to lines strong enough to hold them. And the well-known habit of the "thresher" shark (*Alopecias vulpes*), of hunting with the killer-whale (*Orca gladiator*), assisting these furies to destroy a whale and afterwards amicably dividing the spoil with them, has been enlarged upon many times. Its absolute certainty does not admit of a doubt.

XVII

FLYING-FISH CATCHING AT BARBADOS

Among the many divers methods of garnering the harvest of the sea, one of the most interesting and peculiar is the *Exocetus* fishery of Barbados. Notwithstanding the incredible numbers of Flying-fish (*Exocetus volitans*) that crowd every tropical sea, Barbados is the only place where a systematic fishery of them has ever been established for commercial purposes. This is the more strange when the ease with which they may be taken, and the pleasant conditions under which the fishery is carried on, is considered, while the succulent delicacy of the fish is certainly a thing to remember. Familiar as the appearance of these wonderful little creatures is to ocean travellers, very little is generally known with regard to their habits, haunts, and mode of life. They are usually the recipients of much misspent pity. Relentlessly pursued by the albacore, bonito, and dolphin, they seek the air in shoals, only to be gaily annexed by hovering birds, or to fall gasping upon the deck of some passing

ship. Their fate seems a hard one; but who pities their prey? They in their turn pursue as relentlessly and persecute as ruthlessly the smaller fish; and so the balance is held as truly as nature ever holds it where man does not interfere.

The most common and widely distributed variety of the flying-fish is *E. volitans*, whose range is world-wide between the limits of about thirty-five degrees north and thirty degrees south, though they are most plentifully found within the tropics. They are usually from six to twelve inches in length, body nearly quadrangular, colour of the head and back blue, abdomen silvery, lower lobe of the tail one-half longer than the upper. Some have no teeth, while others are well furnished; and naturalists are unable to agree as to whether they are different varieties, as they are in all other respects identical. The pectoral fins, or wings as they might well be called, are nearly as long as the fish, folding neatly and compactly into the sides of the body while the fish is in the water. The ventral fins are small in this species, and do not appear to be used as wings, merely serving to balance and guide the fish in the air. A very common error made in natural histories where this fish is mentioned is in the statement that it does not fly. "Its supposed flight is nothing more than a prolonged leap; it cannot deviate from a straight line, and cannot rise a second time without entering the water." This, briefly, is the

sort of thing one meets with in text-books where reference is made to this fish.

The simplest way of dealing with it is the Professor's method of answering the query of the French Academy whether their definition of a crab was correct. The story is so well known that it does not need repetition. As the result of personal observation extending over a good many years, I assert that the Exocetus *does fly*. I have often seen a flying-fish rise two hundred yards off, describe a semicircle, and meeting the ship, rise twenty feet in the air, perpendicularly, at the same time darting off at right angles to its previous course. Then, after another long flight, when just about to enter the water, the gaping jaws of a dolphin emerging from the sea gave it pause, and it rose again, returning almost directly upon its former course. This procedure is so common, that it is a marvel it has not been more widely noticed. A flying-fish of mature size can fly a thousand yards. It does not flap its fins as a bird, but they vibrate, like the wings of an insect, with a distinct hum. The only thing which terminates its flight involuntarily is the drying of its fin membranes, and their consequent stiffening.

A marvellous provision of nature is apparent in the economy of this fish. Its swim-bladder can be inflated so as to occupy the whole cavity of the abdomen. Another membrane in the mouth is inflated through the gills. These two reservoirs of air form an excellent substitute for

the air-cells within the bones of birds, and have the additional advantage of being voluntary in their action.

The only other species of flying-fish which is sufficiently distinct to call for notice is *E. nigricans*, locally known as 'Guineamen.' They often exceed eighteen inches in length, and weigh two or three pounds. In these the ventral fins are also very large, giving the fish the appearance of a huge dragon-fly as it darts through the lucent air. The markings of the body are black instead of blue, while the fins are black with a transverse band of silver.

Another strange thing about the natural histories that I have been able to consult is that no idea seems to be formed of where and how these fish spawn. Being met with all over the ocean, where its profound depth precludes all idea of their visiting the bottom, the locality of their breeding-places has puzzled the savants. There can, however, be no doubt that they deposit their ova in the massive banks of *Sargasso bacciferum*, or Gulf-weed, which is met with in such vast quantities as to impede a vessel's progress through it. Through the pleasant groves and avenues of these floating forests, the young fry in millions disport in comparative security, while finding abundant food among the myriad lower forms of life that abound there. Of course, this remark can only apply to the Atlantic. Not having had opportunities enough of observation,

I am unable to say where they spawn in the other oceans they frequent. On the coral reefs of the Leeward Islands and the sandy cays of the Caribbean Sea, I have often amused myself by catching the young fry thrown up with piles of Gulf-weed on the beach, and seen masses of the spawn, like huge bunches of white currants, entangled among its close-knit fronds.

Barbados, situated in the heart of the north-east Trades, is one of the favourite haunts of the flying-fish. Its steep shore-lines afford the blue depths which the flying-fish loves, and permit it to range very near to land. Thus the fishermen rarely go more than ten or twelve miles from home. When this industry was first commenced by the Barbadians, or what led to its establishment, I have been unable to discover; but it certainly has been for many years the mainstay of a large part of the population, and the source whence the most popular food known on the island is derived. There are (or were) about two hundred boats engaged in the fishery. Nowise notable for grace of form or elegance of rig, they are substantial undecked vessels, of from five to fifteen tons capacity, built in the roughest manner, and furnished in the most primitive way. The motive power is a gaff-mainsail and jib, and a couple of sweeps for calms. They are painted a light blue, as nearly approaching the hue of the sea as may be, and every care is taken to make them noiseless.

The fleet leaves the "canash" (harbour) before

daybreak, each skipper taking his own bearings, and making for the spot which he thinks will furnish the best results. As the gorgeous tropical dawn awakes, the boats' peaks are drooped, luffs of sails are hauled up, and the fishermen get to business. The tackle used is of the simplest kind. A wooden hoop three feet in diameter, to which is attached a shallow net with inch meshes; a bucketful of—well, not to put too fine a point on it—stinking fish; a few good lines and hooks, and a set of granes, form the complete lay-out. The fishermen are of all shades, from a deep rich ebony upwards, by fine gradations, to the cadaverous white so common in the island. Their simple fishing costume is usually one sole garment—the humble flour or potato sack of commerce, with holes cut in the bottom and sides, through which to thrust head and arms.

As soon as the boat is hove-to and her way stopped, the usual exuberant spirits and hilarious laughter are put and kept under strong restraint, for a single sound will often scare away all fish in the vicinity, and no more be seen that day. The fisherman leans far over the boat's side, holding the hoop diagonally in one hand. The other hand, holding one of the malodorous fish before mentioned, is dipped into the sea, and the bait squeezed into minute fragments. This answers a double purpose—it attracts the fish; and the exuding oil forms a "sleek" or glassy surface all around, through which one can see

to a great depth. Presently, sundry black specks appear far down; they grow larger and more numerous, and the motionless black man hanging over the gunwale scarcely breathes. As soon as a sufficient number are gathered, he gently sweeps the net downwards and towards the boat withal, bringing it to the surface by drawing it up against the side. Often it will contain as many fish as a man can lift; but so quietly and swiftly is the operation performed, that the school is not startled, and it very often happens that a boat is filled (that is, seven or eight thousand fish) from one school. More frequently, however, the slightest noise, even a passing shadow, will alarm the school; there is a flash of silvery light, and the water is clear, not a speck to be seen. Sometimes the fleet will return with not one thousand fish among them, when prices will range very high, until next day, when, with fifty or sixty boats bringing five or six thousand each, a penny will purchase a dozen.

Occasionally, in the midst of a good spell of fishing, the school will vanish, and a crowd of dolphin, albacore, or bonito make their appearance. Then the sport changes its character. Lines are hastily unrolled, a living flying-fish is impaled on the hook and trolled astern, seldom failing to allure an albacore or some other large fish, varying perhaps from twenty to two hundred pounds weight. On one occasion, when I had the pleasure of a cruise in one of the boats, we had

very poor sport with the flying-fish, only taking about five hundred by noon. Suddenly the few that had been feeding quietly around us fled in all directions, breaking the water with a sound like a sudden rain-storm, and we were aware of the presence of a huge albacore. The skipper shouted gleefully: "By king, sah, him de bigges' albacore in de whol' worl'." He certainly was a monster; but there was little time to admire his proportions. He promptly seized our bait; and the fun commenced. For over an hour this giant mackerel towed us where he would; and when for a moment the pace slackened and we touched the line, he was off again as hard as ever. Right through the fleet he towed us, and finally yielded to our united efforts in the middle of Carlisle Bay, amongst the shipping. We could not hoist him on board, and so had recourse to the expedient of passing a double bight of the line round his tail and towing him into the harbour. Great was the excitement on the quay, and willing hands not a few worked the crane wherewith we lifted him. He scaled four hundred and seventy pounds, the heaviest albacore on record in Barbados. Peddled around the town, he realised a much larger sum than a boat-load of flying-fish would have done; and so the sable skipper was well content with his morning's work.

XVIII

UNCONVENTIONAL FISHING

ENTHUSIASTIC anglers have, I believe, been heard to declare with emphasis that they would rather catch no fish at all than return with a full creel inveigled in an "unsportsmanlike" way. Of course, ideas of what constitutes sport vary almost with the individual, since like the rubric—(with red edges, please)—sporting canons are susceptible of private interpretation. But if the ultimate object of fishing be the gratification of catching fish, my stupidity baulks at the notion of an angler, enthusiastic or stolid, preferring to be unsuccessful rather than to succeed by the excercise of a little personal ingenuity, whether it be unconventional or canonical. What can be more pathetic, for instance, than to see a perfectly-equipped sportsman, whose outfit has made a terrible hole in a £20 note, watching with simulated indifference outwardly, but black envy clawing his liver, some grimy urchin with string and stick grassing fish after fish, while he is unable to get a rise? Perhaps, however, my point of view is unfair,

because one-sided. For while it has many hundreds of times been my lot to either catch some fish or go without a meal, which certainly quickened my interest in the sport, I have seldom had the pleasure of fishing merely for amusement. Although never a professional fisherman, and therefore a hater of nets as reducing the joy of success to the level of scavenging, I have from a very early age, and in nearly every part of the world washed by the sea, taken a hand at fishing from deep personal motives, and always on unconventional lines.

My first introduction to the stern delights of sea-fishing was in a Jamaican harbour when I was thirteen years old. Having been shipwrecked I was for the time by way of being a juvenile beach-comber, but I had plenty of good-natured darky chums. Four of them took me out one day in their canoe barracouta-fishing. Now this fish is a sort of sea-pike which sometimes reaches four feet in length, and for his fierceness is more dreaded in the West Indies by bathers than the much maligned shark. His principal food is small fish, although he is not dainty. In order to imitate as nearly as possible the flight of his usual prey, it is customary for four darkies to man a canoe, get well out to sea during the early morning calm, and then paddle furiously for a few hundred yards at a time, towing a small mackerel at the end of a stout line. On this occasion I held the line. I thought it glorious fun ; but suddenly I saw a bar of silver

leap into the air, followed instanter by my sudden exit from the canoe. I had a turn of the line round my hand, a trick of inexperience. There was a good deal of noise and excitement, during which the dugout capsized and spilled her crew around, while the big fish did his best to tow the light craft away from us; but in some mysterious scrambling fashion we all embarked again. By this time the 'couter was very tired, allowing us to haul him up alongside and take him aboard quite peaceably. Then hey for the beach, borrow a truck, and peddle the prize around town at so much a pound. But they wouldn't take me any more.

A good deal of promiscuous fishing of an unsatisfactory kind was added to my youthful experiences before I reached home, some of it only to be recalled with many pangs. After a long, weary pull in the sweltering, tropical evenings, to drop upon some ghoulish reef-spur and break hook after hook in the rugged coral branches until no more remained, and we must needs return hungry and dispirited—these are not pleasant things to remember. But the following year I made my first long voyage, and on the passage out got an experience that makes my finger-tips tingle to-day. With envious eyes I had watched the mate, as from the end of the flying jibboom he had vainly tried to cozen some bonito (a sort of exaggerated mackerel) that were accompanying the ship into the belief that a shred of white rag

with which he was flicking the water was a flying-fish. Naturally, I burned to show that I could succeed, and no sooner had he come in to take the sun than I was out along the boom like a rat to take his place. There was a fresh breeze blowing, and as the ship heeled and plunged the line blew far away to leeward in a graceful curve which only permitted the rag to touch the wave-tops occasionally. I trembled so with excitement that I could not have kept my perch, but that my legs were jammed in between the jib guys and the boom. I had not been there more than five minutes when a splendid fish sprang twenty feet into the air and swallowed my bait on the wing. I hauled for dear life, scarcely daring to look below where my prize hung dangling, a weight I could only just manage to pull up. But I succeeded at last, and grabbed him to my panting breast. There wasn't time to get scared at the contract I had on my hands; I just hung on while his tremendous vibrations benumbed my body so that I could not even feel that he was actually chafing all the skin off my ribs. At last, feeling my strength almost gone, I plunged him into the folds of the flying-jib, which was furled on the boom, and laid on him. In this way I succeeded in overcoming his reluctance to stay with me, and eventually I bore him on board in triumph, not even dashed by the effective ropes-ending I got for soaking the jib in blood from head to tack. After that memorable capture I was simply crazed

with fishing. Even in calms, when predatory fish such as dolphin, barracouta, bonito, or albacore hang around listlessly and are considered quite uncatchable by seamen generally, I have managed to deceive them and obtain that great desideratum, a fresh mess for all hands. But coming home round the Cape, when in the strength of the Agulhas current, the wind failed, and the mate got out the deep-sea lead-line. In orthodox fashion we passed it forrard and dropped the long plummet into the dark depths, with two or three stout hooks, baited with lumps of fat pork, fastened to it. When we hauled it in each hook was burdened with a magnificent cod, and a scene of wild excitement ensued. All the watch improvised tackle of some kind—a piece of hambro' line, a marlinespike for sinker, and one hook was the usual outfit—and in a couple of hours the deck was like Billingsgate. All sorts and conditions of fish apparently lived down there, and all most accommodating in their appetite.

In Manila Bay the natives taught me how to catch a delicious fish like a more symmetrical John Dory, with a most delicate line of twisted grass and a tiny hook. The bait was rice, boiled to a paste; and so successful was I that all hands enjoyed a hearty supper of fish every evening, being the only crew in the harbour where such a thing was known. On that passage home, however, I caught a Tartar. I was fishing off the boom for bonito, when suddenly the school

closed up into a compact body and fled. I thought it strange, but went on playing my bait. Suddenly out of the cool shade beneath the ship rushed an albacore, grabbing my bait before I had time to lift it out of his way. He wasn't very large for his kind, but my gracious, he was all I wanted. I actually tried to haul him up at first, but I couldn't begin to lift him; so I was fain to play him until we were both exhausted. He was eventually secured at last by the simple expedient of lowering a man overside who slipped a bowline round him, by which he was hoisted on board. He weighed 120 lb., but seemed as strong as a buffalo. Some years after, when out flying-fishing in Barbados one morning, we hooked an albacore that towed our boat, a 5-tonner, for over six miles before he gave in. We towed him alongside into the carenage and had him hoisted on to the wharf by a crane. He weighed 470 lb. The albacore is almost, if not quite, identical with the tunny of the Mediterranean and the tuna of California, and anybody who thirsts for greater sport than the noblest salmon can give, or even the magnificent tarpon, should try what the tuna can do for them.

But of all the queer fish I ever caught, one that I came across in Tonala River, Mexico, was the strangest. It was just inside the bar, and I had been sailing the boat smartly to and fro, catching a kind of caranx that loves a fleeting silvery bait. Sport becoming quiet, and wind

falling, I packed about a pound of fish on my largest hook and let it trail while I smoked the cigarito of laziness. I hoped to get a good-sized fish in this way before returning on board. Suddenly my line tautened out, zip, zip—this was no ordinary fish. After about twenty minutes of thoroughly exhausting work I caught sight of a dirty, brownish mass away down under water. Redoubling my efforts, up came my fish—an alligator ten feet long. He looked perfectly devilish, and for the moment I was really scared. Hooks were scarce, however, so calling upon the darky with me to stand by with a running bowline, I hauled away till I got his hideous snout up out of the water, which I doubt whether I should have done but that he came for me with a rush at the last. Joe dropped the noose over his upper jaw most neatly, getting it tightened between his ugly yellow teeth so that he couldn't bite it. Just then a breeze sprang up, and making the rope fast to a thwart we kept away for the ship, the great saurian's jaws banging against the boat's planks and ripping large splinters out of them. We got him aboard safely, to find "he" was a female, with over a bushel of eggs in her body and a strange collection of rubbish in her stomach.

XIX

DEVIL-FISH

Among such primitive peoples as still survive, not the least curious or notable trait which universally obtains is the manner in which all things uncanny, or which they are unable to comprehend, are by common consent ascribed to the Devil. Not to *a* devil as one of a host, but *the* Devil *par excellence*, as though they understood him to be definable only as the master and originator of whatsoever things are terrifying, incomprehensible, or cruel. Many eminent writers have copiously enriched our literature by their researches into this all-prevailing peculiarity, so that the subject has, on the whole, been well threshed out, and it is merely alluded to *en passant* as one of the chief reasons for the epithet which forms the title of this chapter.

Now it will doubtless be readily admitted that sea-folk retain, even among highly civilised nations, their old-world habits of thought and expression longer than any other branch of the population. This can scarcely be wondered at, since to all of us, even the least imaginative, the eternal mystery

of the ocean appeals with thrilling and ever-fresh effect every time that we come into close personal relations with it.

But when those whose daily bread depends upon their constant struggle with the mighty marine forces, who are familiar with so many of its marvels, and saturated with the awe-inspiring solemnity which is the chief characteristic of the sea, are in the course of their avocations brought suddenly in contact with some seldom-seen visitor of horrent aspect arising from the gloomy unknown depths, with one accord they speak of the monster as a "devil-fish," and the name never fails to adhere.

So that there is, not one species of devil-fish, but several, each peculiar to some different part of the world, and inspiring its own special terror in the hearts of mariners of many nations. Of the Devil-fish that we in this country hear most about, and have indelibly portrayed for us by Victor Hugo, the octopus, so much has been written and said that it is not necessary now to do much more than make passing allusion to the family. But the Cephalopoda embrace so vast a variety that it seems hardly fair to single out of them all the comparatively harmless octopus for opprobrium, while leaving severely unmentioned the gigantic *onychoteuthis* of the deep sea, to say nothing of many intermediate cuttle-fish. From the enormous mollusc just mentioned—which is, not unreasonably, credited by seamen with being the largest fish in the ocean—to the tiny loligo, upon which

nearly all deep-water fish feed, hideousness is their prevailing feature, and truly appalling of aspect some of the larger ones are, while their omnivorous voracity makes them veritable sea-scavengers, to whom nothing comes amiss, alive or dead. And while having no intention to underrate the claims of the octopus to his diabolical prænomen on account of his slimy ugliness and unquenchable ferocity, I feel constrained to put in a word for that little-known horror of the deep, the ten-armed cuttle-fish, which, like some fearful creation of a diseased brain, broods over the dark and silent profundities of ocean, extending his far-reaching tentacles through an immense area, touching nothing living to which they do not cling with an embrace that never relaxes until the victim is safely deposited within the crushing clutch of the great parrot-like mandibles guarding the entrance to that vast and never-to-be satisfied stomach. Nothing that the morbid imagination of man has ever pictured can surpass in awful appearance the reality of this dire chimæra, which, notwithstanding, has undoubtedly an important part to play in the mysterious economy of the sea. "He dwelleth in the thick darkness"; for, not content with the natural gloom of his abode, he diffuses around him a cloud of sepia, which bewilders and blinds his victims, rendering them an easy prey to the never-resting tentacles which writhe through the mirk, ready at a touch to hold whatever is there, be it small or great.

But the strangest fact connected with this mighty mollusc is, that while from the earliest dawn of literature numberless allusions more or less tinged with imagination have been made to it, modern science has only very recently made up its mind to accept as a fact its existence at all. So many indisputable proofs have, however, been forthcoming of late years, both as to the size and structure of the gigantic cuttle-fish, that it has now taken its place among the verities of natural history as indisputably as the elephant or the tiger. It has also been firmly established that the sperm whale or cachalot (*Physeter macrocephalus*) finds his principal, if not his only, food in these huge gelatinous masses while ranging the middle depths of the ocean, and that their appearance on the sea surface is generally due to this whale's aggression.

To pass on, however, to a much less known "devil-fish." In the long fish gallery at the splendid Natural History Museum at South Kensington there is a small specimen, some eighteen inches across, of a fish whose habitat is the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

There it attains enormous proportions, and is, not without reason, known to all the frequenters of those waters as the "devil-fish." When a youngster I was homeward bound from Sant' Ana with a cargo of mahogany, and when off Cape Campèche was one calm afternoon leaning over the taffrail, looking down into the blue profound, on

the watch for fish. A gloomy shade came over the bright water, and up rose a fearsome monster some eighteen feet across, and in general outline more like a skate or ray than anything else, all except the head. There, what appeared to be two curling horns about three feet apart rose one on each side of the most horrible pair of eyes imaginable. A shark's eyes as he turns sideways under your vessel's counter and looks up to see if any one is coming are ghastly, green, and cruel; but this thing's eyes were all these and much more. I felt that the Book of Revelation was incomplete without him, and his gaze haunts me yet. Although quite sick and giddy at the sight of such a bogey, I could not move until the awful thing, suddenly waving what seemed like mighty wings, soared up out of the water soundlessly to a height of about six feet, falling again with a thunderous splash that might have been heard for miles. I must have fainted with fright, for the next thing I was conscious of was awakening under the rough doctoring of my shipmates. Since then I have never seen one leap upward in the daytime. At night, when there is no wind, the sonorous splash is constantly to be heard, although why they make that bat-like leap out of their proper element is not easy to understand. It does not seem possible to believe such awe-inspiring horrors capable of playful gambolling.

At another time, while mate of a barque loading in the Tonala River, one of the Mexican mahogany

ports, I was fishing one evening from the vessel's deck with a very stout line and hook for large fish.

A prowling devil-fish picked up my bait, and feeling the hook, as I suppose, sprang out of water with it. I am almost ashamed to say that I made no attempt to secure the thing, which was a comparatively small specimen, but allowed it to amuse itself, until, to my great relief, the hook broke, and I recovered the use of my line, my evening's sport quite spoiled.

These ugly monsters have as yet no commercial value, although from their vast extent of flat surface they might be found worthy of attention for their skins, which should make very excellent shagreen. A closer acquaintance with them would also most probably divest them of much of the terror in which they are held at present.

Another widely known and feared devil-fish has its headquarters in the Northern Pacific, mostly along the American coast, especially affecting the Gulf of California. This huge creature is a mammal, one of the great whale family, really a rorqual of medium size and moderate yield of oil. Like the rest of this much-detested and shunned (by whalers) branch of the Cetacea, it carries but a tiny fringe of valueless whalebone, and therefore, as compared with the sperm and "right" whales, its value is small. Yet at certain seasons of the year the American whaleships often think it worth their while to spend a month or so bay-

whaling in some quiet inlet unknown to, and uncared for by, the bustling merchantman.

In these secluded spots the California devil-fish, mussel-digger, grey-back, and several other aliases not fit for publication, but all showing how the object of them is esteemed by his neighbours, may sometimes be taken at a disadvantage, the cows languid just before or after parturition, and the bulls who escort them too intent upon their loves to be as wily as is their wont.

But only the *élite* of the Yankee whalemen, dexterous and daring as are all the tribe, can hope to get "to windward" of the diabolically cunning giants whom they abuse with such fluent and frequent flow of picturesque profanity. It is a peculiar characteristic of this animal that it seems ever on the alert, scarcely exposing for one moment its broad back above the sea-surface when rising to spout, and generally travelling, unlike all its congeners, not upon, but a few feet below, the water. For this reason, and in this fishery alone, the whalers arm themselves with iron-shafted harpoons, in order to strike with greater force and certainty of direction a whale some distance beneath the surface. A standing order, too, among them is never by any chance to injure a calf while the mother lives, since such an act exposes all and sundry near the spot to imminent and violent death.

Neglect of this most necessary precaution, or more probably accident, once brought about a

calamity that befell a fleet of thirteen American whaleships which had been engaged in the "bow-head" fishery among the ice-floes of the Arctic Pacific. In order to waste no time, they came south when winter set in, and by common consent rendezvoused in Margharita Bay, Lower California, for a month or two's "devil-fishing."

The whales were exceedingly abundant that season, and all the ships were soon busy with as much blubber as they could manage. The ease with which the whales were being obtained, however, led to considerable carelessness and forgetfulness of the fact that the whale never changes its habits. One bright morning, about three weeks after the opening of the season, the whole flotilla of fifty-two boats, four from each ship, had been lowered and were making their way as rapidly as possible to the outlying parts of the great bay, keeping a bright look-out for "fish." Spreading out fan-wise, they were getting more and more scattered, when about the centre of the fleet some one suddenly "struck" and got fast to a fish. But hardly had the intimation been given when something very like panic seized upon the crowd. In a moment or two the reason was apparent. From some cause, never definitely known, a harpooner had in striking at a large cow whale transfixed her calf at her side with his harpoon, killing it immediately. The mother, having quietly satisfied herself that her offspring was really dead, turned upon her aggressors like a

veritable demon of destruction, and, while carefully avoiding exposure of her body to attack, simply spread devastation among the flotilla. Whenever she rose to the surface, it was but for a second, to emit an expiration like the hiss of a lifting safety-valve, and almost always to destroy a boat or complete the destruction of one already hopelessly damaged.

Every blow was dealt with an accuracy and appearance of premeditation that filled the superstitious Portuguese, who formed a good half of the crews, with dismay—the more so that many of them could only guess at the original cause of what was really going on. The speed of the monster was so great, that her almost simultaneous appearance at points widely separated made her seem ubiquitous ; and as she gave no chance whatever for a blow, it certainly looked as if all the boats would be destroyed *seriatim*. Not content with dealing one tremendous blow at a boat and reducing it at once to a bundle of loose boards, she renewed her attentions again and again to the wreckage, as if determined that the destruction should be complete.

Utter demoralisation had seized even the veterans, and escape was the only thought governing all action. But the distance to shore was great, and the persistence and vigour of the furious leviathan, so far from diminishing, seemed to increase as the terrible work went on. At last two boats did succeed in reaching the beach at a point

where it sloped very gradually. The crews had hardly leaped overboard, to run their craft up high and dry, when close behind them in the shallows foamed and rolled their relentless enemy, just too late to reach them. Out of the large number of well-equipped boats that left the ships that morning, only these two escaped undamaged, and the loss of the season's work was irremediable. Over fifty men were badly injured, and six, one of whom was the unhappy origin of the whole trouble, were killed outright. The triumphant avenger of her slain offspring disappeared as silently as she had carried on her deadly warfare, as far as could be known unhurt, and with an accumulated hoard of experience that would, if possible, render her more of a "devil" to any unsuspecting whalemen who should hereafter have the misfortune to meet with and attack her than she had proved herself to be already.

Dejected and crippled, the fleet lost no time in getting away from the spot and fleeing north to San Francisco, there to refit for other and more profitable fishing grounds.

There are a great many "ower-true" tales told of the prowess of this wily creature, but the selection that I have made will doubtless suffice for a fair specimen of what the California "devil-fish" is capable of when opportunity arises.

The volatile and tuneful negroes of the West India islands have their own peculiar "devil-fish," but in this case there is nothing diabolical in the

appearance or vast in the size of the creature. It is, indeed, a very well-known fish in most tropical waters, and must from its habits and appearance be closely allied to the hake and pike. Among seamen generally it is well known as the barracouta, and is especially plentiful around the New Zealand coast, where a few hours of the peculiar fishing practised by the Maories will generally reward the fisherman with a gross or so of fish averaging 10 to 12 lb. each.

It is among the Leeward Islands, however, that the barracouta attains his largest dimensions, and has inspired the fishermen and boatmen with such dread of him that, while they hold the universally feared shark in supreme contempt, the mere rumour of a "devil-fish" anywhere in their vicinity will bring every nigger within hail scrambling out of the water in double-quick time.

Whether rightly or wrongly, I have never been able to ascertain by personal observation, but undoubtedly the fact is that the barracouta is credited with an infernal propensity for inflicting a nameless mutilation upon any human being unfortunate enough to get within reach of him. He is long and narrow, blue-black above, with a silvery-grey belly, and swift as an arrow. His lower jaw is considerably longer than the upper, and both are armed with teeth, almost exactly like those of a dog. From this configuration of the jaws it is unnecessary for the barracouta to turn on its back, like the shark, when he comes for you. Silent,

straight, swift, and almost invisible in those dark-blue waters, the first intimation of his presence is often the fatal snap of those lethal jaws, which leaves the hapless victim beyond hope of recovery.

Before quitting this portion of the subject a passing reference may be permitted to a very disheartening occurrence due to the predatory habits of these fish. At great cost some public-spirited individuals had stocked the upper reaches of the pretty river Clutha in Otago, New Zealand, with salmon-fry from ova imported from England. The incipient salmon flourished until in the course of natural development they reached the "parr" stage of their career. Then in an evil hour they journeyed seawards until they reached the estuary of the river. A school of barracouta had just previously crossed the bar from the sea, and in their search for living food happened upon the toothsome innocents from the secure spawning-beds above. Long did the patient watchers up-country wait, but never more did one of those youthful salmon return to them. All the money spent was wasted, and all the high hopes of a plentiful supply of indigenous salmon were frustrated for years.

There are, of course, many other marine monstrosities to which with more or less show of reason the satanic epithet has been applied; but they are very little known or noticed, except within certain narrow limits. Probably enough has been said to justify simple savages and almost

equally simple-minded seamen in bestowing upon the creatures of their dread a name which to them embodies all they are able to conceive of pitiless cruelty, unquenchable ferocity, and unmatchable cunning.

XX

OF TURTLE

By popular consent the rash act of the daring man who first devoured an oyster has been greatly extolled, but what meed of praise should be awarded to that dim and distant discoverer who first essayed to break into and devour the flesh of the armour-clad tortoise or turtle? All unarmed as he doubtless must have been, except for spear of chipped flint or charred stick, the mere entry within the *domus* of the reptile, even by way of the leathery neck or flank, must have been no easy feat.

But, once having tasted such good meat, how rapidly the news must have been spread by our friend! Here was a banquet indeed, ready to hand, for the acquisition of which none of the ordinary attributes of the chase were needed. Speed, courage, endurance, cunning, all could be dispensed with, while even the most unenlightened "salvage-man" would hardly need the information that it were wise to avoid the front end of the sluggish creature, with its terrible jaws of keen-edged shell.

Since those far-off days mankind has been faithful in its love for the genus *Testudo*, whether terrestrial or marine, wherever edible members of it could be obtained; but when and why the consumption of turtle-soup became with us a synonym for the highest luxury in the way of food, and indissolubly associated with the royal hospitality of the Lord Mayor, is indeed a question to be answered. One may be permitted to suppose that, during the reign of some more than usually gifted *cordon bleu*, the grand discovery was made that the peculiar flesh of this succulent reptile lent itself most amicably and gelatinously to the wonderful disguise with which it is invested ere it becomes the dream of the epicure. The pages of ancient Latin writers abound with descriptions, not only of strange foods, but stranger modes of preparing them for the table, the mere recital of which to-day is often sufficient to effectually banish appetite. Among these early recipes are many for dealing with the flesh of both land and sea tortoises. According to their light those ancient cooks excelled in curious ways of dressing turtle, or rather disguising it, for it must be confessed that turtle-steak *au naturel* is not of that exquisite flavour to appeal to the palate like a plain beefsteak or mutton-chop. Good, wholesome, and tender as it undoubtedly is, it tastes more like veal with a nuance of fish than anything else in the best kinds; while many turtles, from feeding upon cuttle-fish, have a decidedly

unpleasant, musky flavour. Few flesh foods pall quicker upon the palate. In most West Indian coast towns an abundant meal of turtle can be obtained for the equivalent of sixpence whenever required, but except by those whose object is to fill up cheaply and quickly, it is little appreciated.

I was once mate of a barque gathering a cargo of mahogany along the Mexican coast, and while lying at Tonala the supply of fresh beef ran short. The skipper bought a fine large turtle for a mere trifle from some fishermen, and rather chuckled at the prospect of getting two days' meat for less than the usual price of one. He gave orders to the worn-out seaman whom, in common with vessels of that class, we carried as cook, etc., to apportion the joints. At eight bells a procession of weary-looking men slouched aft, the foremost one bearing a kid of something. He came to the break of the poop, and as spokesman inquired for the captain. That gentleman stepped briskly forward, saying, 'Well, what's up now?" "What d'ye call *that*, sir?" said the man. "*That*," said the skipper, giving just a glance at the queer-looking mess in the kid; "why yer so-and-so idiot, that's what the Lord Mayor gives about a guinea a hounce for. Why, only the haristocracy gets a charnce at 'ome to eat the likes o' that." "Oh, very well," said the man; "p'r'aps you'll eat it yourself then, sir, since its *so* —— good, and give us what we signed for. We aint crockeydiles to eat shell-fish, shells an' all." With that he planted his little tub,

with its strange contents, down on the poop and stalked forward again, followed by his scowling shipmates. I am bound to admit that there was little room for wonder that Jack on this occasion preferred *salt horse* to boiled turtle.

But this is by the way. Of terrestrial Chelones there is an immense variety distributed over almost the whole land surface of the globe where the mean annual temperature does not fall below 60°. The flesh of these reptiles is, with few exceptions, notably that of the American Terrapin, very lightly esteemed by civilised peoples, and in some species highly poisonous. A very strange fact concerning land tortoises is the presence of the largest members of the family upon such widely separated and inhospitable spots as Aldabra and Agalegas Islands in the Indian Ocean, and the Galapagos group in the South Pacific. In these lonely islets—for they are hardly more—enormous specimens of these strange reptiles crawl sluggishly about, grazing upon the scanty herbage, secure from all enemies except man, and apparently gifted with incredible longevity. As far as natural decay is concerned, they would certainly appear to be unaffected by the flight of time, although one need not believe unless he wants to the story of the sailor of one upon whose shell he saw carved the legend, 'The Ark—Captain Noah; Ararat, for orders.' The Galapagans eat them during scarcity of other food, but do not hanker after them as regular diet. They do, however, prize

the fat oil which some of these reptiles possess in great abundance, and whenever they catch one and do not need its flesh, they cut a slit in the leathery skin between the upper and lower shells near the tail and take a peep within. If the victim be not fat enough for their purpose they release him, and he shuffles off apparently quite unaffected by this rough surgery. Indeed, such is the incredible vitality of these reptiles that they have been known to live for six months after having their brains entirely removed, and one existed for twenty-three days after its head had been cut off.

Redi, the well-known Italian surgeon, who made these apparently useless experiments, states that, upon opening the body of the last-mentioned tortoise, on the twenty-third day he saw the triple heart beating, and the blood entering and leaving it. What he hoped to establish by such cruel doings is not stated by him.

Varieties of land tortoises are exceedingly numerous, and embrace some very peculiar forms, notably the *Emysaura serpentina*, which is a kind of compromise between a lizard and a tortoise, lives in and around Oriental lakes and rivers, and feeds indiscriminately upon small fish, reptiles, and birds. The *Chelodina Novæ Hollandiæ* of Australia, with its long snake-like neck and wide gaping jaws ; the *Chelys matamata*, loving stagnant pools, and adorned about the head and neck with sprouting fringes like bunches of rootlets, giving

it a most uncanny appearance; and the *Gymnopus* of African rivers, which feeds upon young crocodiles, and whose flesh is nevertheless most delicate and highly prized, and many others, furnish a most interesting study, but not strictly germane to our subject, which is turtle—the *Thalassians* or oceanic tortoises, from which alone our supplies are drawn.

Among marine tortoises or turtles there is vastly less variety than among their congeners of the land. Sir Richard Owen decided that only five well-defined species are known to exist at the present day, although the fossil remains of true turtles show that a much greater range of these varieties existed in prehistoric times. The principal difference between tortoise and turtle is the shape of the paws, which in the land varieties are always armed with claws, and have a strong likeness to the legs of a lizard. In the turtles these clawed feet become flippers, almost fins, wonderfully adapted for swimming purposes, but rendering the turtle when on land more helpless and clumsy in his locomotion than even a seal.

Turtles are true amphibians, although, owing to the extent and volume of their arbitrary lungs, and perhaps also to their general sluggishness of habit, they can and do remain under water for a longer time than any other amphibian, with the exception, perhaps, of the crocodile. But, like the saurian just mentioned, it is imperative that they leave the sea periodically for the purpose of laying

their eggs, which they do in loose sand, leaving them to be hatched by the heat of the sun. It has been authoritatively stated that when the young turtle first emerges from the egg his shell is not formed, and that he is white in colour. Perhaps different species may account for a discrepancy here; but I can only say, that having, for many hours, along the shores of islets in the Caribbean Sea and around the Gulf of Mexico, amused myself by digging up turtles' and crocodiles' eggs, breaking them, and sending the lively occupants afloat, I have never seen either a white or a shell-less one. Of course the shell was not of the substance one would expect in a full-grown individual, but it was hard and perfectly formed, while the tiny creature was wonderfully swift in its movements. Innumerable enemies await the infant turtle, extending even to his own kind, and but a small percentage of those hatched are privileged to arrive at maturity. Nevertheless, such is the fecundity of these reptiles, that their numbers are exceedingly large, and even where old-established stations for turtle-catching exist, no diminution of their numbers is ever seen.

Having reached a weight of about twenty-five pounds, they are thenceforth safe from all enemies except man, and even he gets but scant opportunity to molest them save when they visit their favourite beaches for family purposes.

When a lad of thirteen I had the misfortune to be cast away upon one of the reef-fringed islets in

the Bay of Campêche. The vessel became a total wreck, and we escaped to the islet, finding it bare of everything but an immense number of boobies and frigate-birds, the beach being covered with the eggs of the former, and the rocks plentifully besprinkled with the eggs of the latter. The first night of our stay I was taking a lonely stroll along the beach—the whole circuit of the isle could be made under an hour—when I saw a light cloud of sand rising from the smooth white plain just ahead of me. At first the idea of an inrush of the sea occurred to me; but going carefully nearer, I saw an immense black centre to the misty spot, apparently digging furiously. Hurrying back to camp, I gave the alarm, and three of the men accompanied me back. Without any difficulty they managed to secure the creature, which was an enormous turtle weighing not less than 1800 lb. It was rather a tough job turning her over, but once on her broad back she was helpless, and was speedily towed to camp. Next morning at day-break she was butchered, and more than eight hundred eggs, of which only thirteen were with shells, were taken from her ovary. The carapace was so large that it made me a good bath. The meat was all removed and hung up, only the head and tail being left attached to the shell. Late that afternoon a young Dane, in some foolish freak or another, must needs go and introduce two of his fingers into the open mouth of the apparently dead head. Like the action of an iron-shearing

press the jaws closed, taking off the two fingers as clean as possible. Then another man essayed to cut off the tail, but as soon as the knife entered the skin the tail curled up and gripped the blade, and it was nearly an hour before he could withdraw it. So that their vitality must be little, if any, inferior to that of the land tortoise

One of the most favoured spots frequented by turtle is, or used to be, the desolate island of Ascension in the South Atlantic, a barren volcanic patch belonging to Britain, and, because used exclusively as a naval depot, entered upon the books of the Admiralty as one of Her Majesty's ships. An enormous number of turtle were annually "turned" there, and preserved in a small lagoon from shipment to shipment. It was my pleasant privilege to assist at one of these turnings, and I bear a very vivid recollection of the game. Crouched low behind an immense boulder one evening about eight o'clock, we could hear a hollow reverberating murmur of the mighty surf outside, suggesting sleepily irresistible force. A dazzling wreath of snowy foam, gleaming like burnished silver, fringed the quiet stretch of glittering sand, which, gently sloping upward and landward, was bounded by gloomy bastions of black lava. Beyond that shining semicircle of glowing white lay the sombre blue-black bosom of the quiet little bay, now heaving gently as that of a sleeping child. Hither and thither, threading its mysterious depths, glided spectrally broad tracks of greenish

light, vivid, yet ever brightening and fading, as if of living flame. Presently there emerged from the retreating smother of spume a creeping something of no very definite shape, under the glamour of the molten moonlight, but making an odd shuffling progress inland, and becoming more recognisable as it rose. Another, and yet another, and still more arrived as the shining tracks converged shorewards. At last the dark shapes came near enough for a novice to know them for turtle. Soon the first-comers reached their limit, and began the work for which they were here. Each massive reptile, by an indescribable motion of its fore-flippers, delved into the yielding grit, throwing the spoil behind it and upward withal until it was enveloped in a misty halo of shining sand. Then the whole beach was alive with the toiling Chelones and their male attendants, who shuffled about, emitting curious noises, but whether of encouragement or affection this deponent sayeth not.

Divers of them came from far—so far that none who have not witnessed the swift cleaving of their true element by these ungainly monsters could believe how the wide sweep of those eager flippers devours the fleeting leagues. In a short time many of the delving turtles had sunk below the level of the surrounding sand, while some had ceased their digging and commenced to deposit their eggs. Suddenly we rushed upon them, and for some minutes the swarming beach was appar-

ently a scene of wild confusion. Really, the plan of attack was well ordered ; and when the first scurry was over nearly all the visitors were to be seen wrong side up, waving their flippers deprecatingly. In less than half an hour the loneliness was again regnant, the victims having been towed off through a gap in the rocks to a spacious spoilarium in the lagoon behind, there to await their transit to the goal of most good things, London town.

While the capture of turtle upon a sandy shore necessarily admits of but few variations, the pursuit of these reptiles in their proper element lends itself to many peculiarities. How often does the ever-hungry sailor, striving wearily to forget his plentiful lack of tasty eatables while on the look-out of some calm-bound "wind-jammer," get a delightful thrill upon seeing the broad shining back of a sleeping *Spharga* calmly floating upon the sunlit surface of the silent sea ! Visions of "a fresh mess for all hands" nerve the watch to desperate efforts in order to quickly free the gig from its long-disused trammels. Once afloat, there are several ways of securing the prize. Roughly, the orthodox method is for one hand to "scull" the boat with one oar over the stern *à la Chinoise*, while one stationed in the bow may, when near enough, drive a harpoon through the carapace of the slumberer. Or one may not. And candour compels the statement that the percentage of successes is not high. If the performer be not very expert with the weapon—and

very few sailors are—the result is usually a burst of angry jeers from disappointed shipmates, and a few eddying swirls on the surface whence the awakened turtle has fled in amazement.

Another way practised most successfully by the amphibious Kanakas of Polynesia is to slip noiselessly into the water, and, diving beneath the turtle, grasp the hind flippers with crossed hands. One swift and dexterous twist places the prize on his back, in which helpless position he is kept with ease upon the surface until the canoe arrives and he is transferred to it. Among the coral reefs of the Friendly Islands turtle-fishing is a highly favoured form of sport, and when the reptiles are surprised among the tortuous shallow channels between the reefs or in the almost land-locked lagoons, they rarely escape. Here it is usual for the fisherman to spring upon the turtle's back, and, clutching the fore edge of the shell with both hands, to hang on until his prize is exhausted and speedily brought to the surface.[1]

But of all the fashions of securing this much-hunted creature, that followed by the ingenious fisher-folk of the Chinese littoral bears away the palm. Most voyagers in tropical seas are acquainted with a peculiar fish, *E. remora*, known generally by the trivial name of "sucker." The distinguishing characteristic of this fish is lazi-

[1] But the turtle can by no means be kept on the surface until it *is* exhausted. The first act of a hunted turtle is to seek the depths.

ness. Unwilling to exert itself overmuch in the pursuit of food, it has developed an arrangement on the back of its head exactly like the corrugated sole of a tennis shoe, and as artificial in appearance as if made and fitted by the hand of man. When the sucker finds itself in the vicinity of any large floating body, such as a ship, a shark, or a piece of flotsam, whose neighbourhood seems to promise an abundance of food, it attaches itself firmly thereto by means of this curious contrivance, which permits it to eat, breathe, and perform all necessary functions while being carried about without any exertion on its part. It can attach and detach itself instantaneously, and holds so firmly that a direct backward pull cannot dislodge it without injury to the fish. The Chinese, who have successfully trained the cormorant and the otter to fish for them, have taken the remora in hand with the happiest results. Several good-sized specimens having been caught, small iron rings are fitted to their tails, to which are attached long, slender, but very strong lines. Thus equipped, the fishermen set out, and when a basking turtle is seen, two or three of the suckers are slipped overboard. Should they turn and stick to the bottom of the sampan, they are carefully detached by being pushed forward with the inevitable bamboo, and started on the search again. At last they attach themselves to the supine turtle. Then the fishermen haul in the lines, against which gentle suasion the hapless Chelone struggles in

vain. Once on board the lugger, the useful remora is detached, and is at once ready for use again.

The same mode of catching turtle is followed by the fishermen of the East African coast, from Mozambique northward. The coast of Africa has long been famous for its turtle, and Pliny tells of the Chelonophagi of the Red Sea, a race of turtle-eaters, who were able to obtain these creatures of so gigantic a size that they could utilise the carapaces for roofs to their dwellings and boats for their feeble voyages. Strabo also alludes to these people; but without accusing either of these venerable authorities of exaggeration, it is pretty certain that no such enormous specimens of Chelonia are ever met with in these days.

Tortoise-shell is well known to be furnished by the turtle, the best by the Hawk's Bill variety, which supplies the worst flesh, being exceedingly musky (*Chelone imbricata*). The green turtle (*Chelonée franche*) is most valuable for food, and attains, with another well-marked variety (*Spharga Coriacea*), the largest size of all turtles known. This latter has been sometimes taken on the coast of Britain, several of large size (700 to 800 lb. weight) having been recorded as caught in our seas.

OTHER SKETCHES

XXI

'HOVELLING'[1]

WHAT particular law of etymology has been evoked to produce the queer word standing at the head of this paper I am unable to imagine. Like Topsy, I "'spects it growed," but my own private opinion is that it is the Kentish coast way of pronouncing the word "hovering," since the hovellers are certainly more often occupied in hovering than in doing anything more satisfactory to themselves.

However strange the word may sound in a landsman's ears, it is one of the most familiar to British seamen, especially among our coasters, although the particular form of bread-winning that it is used to designate is practically confined to the Kent and Sussex shores of the English Channel, having its headquarters at Deal. Briefly, a "hoveller" is a boatman who follows none of

[1] Whilst this reprint was in the press the writer received an ingenious explanation of the word from Mr. Charles Fleet, an old resident on the Sussex coast. He derives it from "Hoviler," a sort of mounted militia raised during the Commonwealth, and so named from the "hovils" (leathern jackets) they wore.

the steady orthodox lines of boatmanship, such as fishing, plying for passengers, etc., but hovers around the Channel, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, a pilot, a wrecker, or if a ghost of a chance presents itself, a smuggler.

Naturally, the poor hoveller does not bear the best of characters. The easy unconventional fit of his calling settles that for him as conclusively as the cryptic term "general dealer," so often seen in police-court reports, does a man's status ashore, but with far less reason. It must be admitted that he is not over-scrupulous or prone to regard too rigidly the laws of *meum* and *tuum*. The portable property which occasionally finds its way into his boat is, however, usually ownerless except for the lien held by the Crown upon all flotsam, jetsam, and ligan; which rights, all unjust as he in common with most seafarers consider them to be, he can hardly be blamed for ignoring.

But when the worst that can be alleged against the character of the hoveller has been said, a very large margin of good remains to his credit, good of which the general public never hears, or hearing of it, bestows the praise elsewhere.

They are the finest boatmen in the world. Doubtless this seems a large claim to make on their behalf, but it is one that will be heartily endorsed by all who know anything of the condition of the English Channel in winter, and are at the same time in a position to make comparisons. And it must also be remembered that

the harvest of the hoveller is gathered when the wintry weather is at its worst, when the long, hungry snare of the Goodwins is snarling and howling for more and more of man's handiwork to fill its for ever unsatisfied maw, when the whole width of the strait is like a seething cauldron, and the atmosphere is one weltering whirl of hissing spindrift; while the hooting syrens, shrieking whistles, and clanging bells from the benighted and groping crowd of unseen vessels blend their discord with the tigerish roar of the storm in one bewildering chaos of indescribable tumult.

Then, when the fishermen have all run for shelter, and even the hardy tugboats hug some sheltering spit or seaward-stretching point, the hoveller in his undecked clinker-built lugger, some thirty-five feet long and ten feet beam, square-sterned and sturdy-looking like himself, may be seen through the writhing drifts of fog and spray climbing from steep to steep of the foaming billows like a bat hawking along some jagged cliff.

She shows just a tiny patch of brown sail, a mere shred, but sufficient to keep her manageable with her head within five or six points of the wind and her stub-bow steadily pointed to the onrush of the toppling seas. Every other wave sends a solid sheet of spray right over her, hiding her momentarily from view, but the row of squat figures sitting motionless along the weather gunwale heed it no more than as if they were graven images. And thus they cruise, hungry and thirsty, their

eyeballs burning with sleeplessness, throughout the weary hours of night and day, with every sense acutely strained and every moment balanced upon the very scythe-edge of death. Long practice makes them keen of sight as the wailing gulls overhead, and small indeed must be the floating object that escapes their unremitting scrutiny.

Homeward-bound sailing ships from oversea ports are what they principally lust after. The skippers of these vessels after their long absence from home usually feel more or less anxious as they near the narrows. The Trinity pilots in their trim cutters have their cruising ground definitely fixed for them by authority, extending no further west than Dungeness. But long before that well-known point, with its dazzling spear of electric radiance reflected from the gloomy pall of cloud above, is reached, the homeward-bound skipper's anxiety becomes almost unbearable if the weather be thick and he has as yet made no land-fall to verify his position. Then the sudden appearance of a hoveller emerging from the mirk around, and his cheery hail, "D'ye want a pilot, sir?" is heavenly in its relief. For these men, although regarded with no small contempt and disfavour by the aristocracy of pilotage licensed by the Trinity Brethren, know the Channel as a man knows the house he has lived in for years, know it at all times, whether in calm or storm, the blackness of winter midnight, the brilliance of summer noon, or the horrible uncertainty of enshrouding fog.

The hoveller can hardly be blamed if he take full advantage of the foulness of the weather to drive as hard a bargain as he can with the skipper of a hesitating homeward-bounder for the hire of his invaluable local knowledge. Full well he knows that when the skies are serene and the wind is favourable he may tender his services in vain, even at the lowest price. No master, in these days of fierce competition, dare make an entry of a hoveller's fee in his bill of expenses, except under pressure of bad weather, on pain of being considered unfit for his post, and finding himself compelled to pay the charge out of his own scanty salary.

So that fine weather to the hoveller spells empty pocket and hungry belly. The long, bright days of summer bring to him no joy, though thoughtless passengers lounging at their ease upon the promenade deck of some palatial steamship may think his lot a lazy, lotus-eating way of drowsing through the sunny hours. Neither would they imagine from his wooden immobility of pose and the unbending appearance of his rig what fiery energy he is capable of displaying when opportunity arises.

On one occasion, when I was a lad of eighteen, we were homeward bound from Luzon to London. We sighted Corvo dimly through the driving mist of a fierce westerly gale, before which we bowled along at the rate of 300 miles a day. For nearly five days we fled thus for home, seeing

nothing except an occasional dim shape of some vessel flitting silently past. Not a glimpse of the heavenly bodies was vouchsafed us whereby to fix our position, nor did we haul up once for a cast of the deep-sea lead. At last by "dead reckoning" we were well up Channel, but the steady thrust of the gale never wavered in force or direction. The mist grew denser, the darkness more profound. By the various sounds of foghorns and whistles we knew that many vessels surrounded us, and that it was scarcely less dangerous to heave-to than to run. Presently, by the narrowest of shaves, we missed running down a light outward-bound barque, the incident leaving us with yards swinging every way and a general feeling of uncertainty as to what would happen next. Suddenly out of the gloom to leeward came the hoarse cry, "Want a pilot, sir?" It was the sweetest music imaginable. All eyes were strained in the direction of the voice. In a minute or two the well-known shape of a hovelling lugger became visible, under a double reefed lug, rushing towards us. He rounded to by our lee quarter, and in reply to our skipper's query, "How much will you take me up to the Ness for?" came the prompt answer; "Ten pounds." "Ten devils!" yelled our skipper; "why, you adjective hovelling pirate, it's only about ten minutes' walk." "Better get out 'n walk it then, cap'n," said the boatman; "can't take you up for no less to-night." The usual haggling began, but was cut short by the hoveller, who shouted, "So long,

cap'n, time's precious," giving at the same time a pull at his tiller which sent the boat striding a cable's length to leeward. "All right," roared the old man, "come aboard, and be dam'd t'you," and at the word the lugger was back alongside again. Launching his dinghy was out of the question in such a sea, for at one moment the boat was level with our shearpoles, the next she seemed groping under our keel. "Heave us a line, cap'n," shouted he, and the mate hurled a coil of the lee main-brace at him. Quick as a wink he had cast a bowline round his waist with the end. "Haul away aboard," he cried, and as his boat rose on the crest of a big sea he sprang at the ship and missed her. But he had hardly time to disappear in the smother of foam, before he was being dragged up the side like a bale of rags, and almost instantly tumbled on deck. Springing to his feet, he dashed the water out of his eyes, and as calmly as if nothing unusual had happened, said to the man at the wheel, "Put your hellum up, m'lad, square away the main-yard, haul aft the main-sheet," and as if by magic the weather seemed to fine down and a great peace reigned. "Steady as she goes, m'lad," said he to the helmsman, with a peep at the compass; and then turning to the skipper, in a wheedling voice, "You couldn't spare my mates a bit o' grub, I s'pose, sir, and a plug of terbacker?" "Oh yes," replied the captain with alacrity. "Stooard! get a couple o' pieces of beef out o' the harness cask, and some

bread in a bag, for the boatmen. I'll go down and get them some tobacco." Already the lugger was closing in on us again, and by the time the longed-for provisions were at hand, she was near enough for them to be hove on board. A further plea for a drop of rum could not be entertained, as we had none, but well pleased with the result of their visit the rovers sheered off and were swallowed up in the encircling darkness. Exactly three-quarters of an hour later we rounded the Ness and hove-to for the pilot, the lugger popping up under our lee again as if she had been towing astern, and receiving back the lucky hoveller with his fat fee in his pocket.

Years after, in a much larger ship, of which I was second mate, we were bound right round the coast to Dundee, and got befogged somewhere off Beachy Head. As on the previous occasion, the wind was strong, and blowing right up Channel. A hoveller came alongside and made a bargain to take us up to Dungeness for ten pounds. By the time he had scrambled on board, our captain began to wonder whether he might be available to pilot us right round to Dundee, not feeling very confident in his own knowledge of the navigation of the East coast. So he put the question to our visitor, who replied that he himself was not qualified, and indeed would not be allowed to take us if he were. But he could arrange to have a North Sea pilot out in Deal Roads awaiting us on our arrival there. This was too much for our skipper's

power of belief. That cockle-shell of a lugger able to outstrip his 1400-ton ship, with this breeze behind her, so much in forty miles! It couldn't be done. "Never mind, sir," said the hoveller, "you make my money thirteen pound for the whole job, and if you have to wait in the Downs for your pilot, you needn't pay me more than ten." "It's a go," answered the captain, fully satisfied.

Hailing his boat, the Dealman gave his instructions. Crowding on all sail, away she went, sheering in for the shore, and soon was lost to sight in the mist. Meanwhile we also set all the sail she could carry, and made a fairly rapid run to the Downs. Sure enough, there was a galley punt awaiting us, the men lying on their oars, and the pilot with his bag lounging in the stern. The skipper said not a word as he handed our hoveller his full money, but he looked like a man who had been badly beaten in a contest of wits.

But if one would see the hoveller at his best, it is when some hapless vessel has met her fate on the Goodwins during a gale. The silent suck of those never-resting sands makes the time of her remaining above water very short, without the certainty of her rapid breaking up under the terrible battering of the mighty seas. Gathering around the doomed fabric, like jackals round a carcass, the hardy beachmen perform prodigies of labour. The work which they will do, wrenching out cargo and fittings, and transferring them to their boats, while the straining, groaning hull

threatens every moment to collapse beneath their eager feet, and the bitter tempest fills the air with salt spray, to say nothing of an occasional breaker which buries wreck and wreckers alike beneath its incalculable mass of foaming water, cannot be adequately described—it must be seen to be realised. As if mad with desire, they tear and strain and heave like Titans, apparently insensible to fatigue. For they know that at any moment their prize may vanish from beneath them, and with her all their hopes of gain. Weather has for them no terrors. Let but the cry of "wreck" go up, and though even the lifeboat be beaten back, the hoveller will get there somehow, not under any pretence of philanthropy, but in the hope of earning something, though it may be gratefully recorded that they never shirk the most terrible risks when there is a hope of saving life.

Such sudden and violent transitions from utter idleness to the most tremendous exertion as they continually experience do not seem to harm these toughened amphibia. Plenty of them do of course "go under" in more or less distressing circumstances, but though their own tiny circle laments their loss, their tragic fate makes no more disturbance than the drop of a pebble outside of it. There are plenty to take their place. For even in so precarious a calling as hovelling there are grades. The poor possessors of only a four-oared galley hope to rise to the dignity of a lugger, so that they may quit scrabbling along the shores

and get out to where, if the dangers are indefinitely increased, the chances of a good haul now and then are proportionately greater.

Another phase of their calling is the rescue of vessels who from various causes are drifting to destruction. Many a craft reaches port in safety with a couple of Dealmen on board, that but for their timely help would never have been heard of again. I know of one case where a large French *chasse-marée*, with a cargo of wine, lost her foremast off the Varne shoal. In its fall it crippled the skipper and one of the crew. Another one was frost-bitten, and the remaining two, both boys, were so paralysed with fright that they were quite useless. So in the grey of the New Year's dawn, with a pitiless snowstorm raging from the N.W., she was drifting helplessly along the edge of the sand. Two hovellers saw her plight at the same time, and each strained every nerve to get up to her first, for she was a prize well worth the winning. At last they drew so near to her that it was anybody's race. But the head man of the foremost lugger tore off his oilskins, sea-boots, and fear-nought jacket, and plunging into the boiling sea actually battled his way to her side, climbing on board triumphantly, and so making good his claim. It is satisfactory to be able to add that the dauntless rascal was completely successful in bringing the *Trois Frères* into Dover, and shared with his four mates £120 for salvage services. Not a bad twenty-four hours'

work, but for nearly two months before they had earned less than five shillings per man per week, and they all had wives and families dependent upon them.

Yet with all their hardships, they are free. No man is their master, for they always sail on shares, varied a little according to each individual's monetary stake in the boat. And doubtless the wild life has a certain charm of its own, which goes far to counterbalance its severity and danger. "An' anyhow," as one of them said to me not long ago, "ourn's a bizness the bloomin' Germans ain't likely to do us out of. There ain't many left like that, is ther?"

XXII

THE LOSS OF THE 'ST. GEORGE'

An Incident of the Anglo-German War of 19—

"Things is lookin' pretty bad for the British sailor, Bill, don't ye think?"

"Well, fur's I c'n see, they can't look much wuss, Joe. I know one thing: 'f I c'd a only got a billet ashore—even a bloomin' dus'man's job—I'd a never even smelt salt water agen. W'y, there ain't no Henglish ships now 'ceptin' fur the flag. But I will say this much; I never seen it quite so bad's this afore."

The speakers were the only two British seamen before the mast on board the four-masted steel sailing ship *St. George*, of Liverpool, bound from London to Melbourne with a general cargo of immense value, and nearly five thousand tons measurement. In the square of the main hatch was carefully stowed forty tons of blasting and rifle powder received at the "red buoy," Gravesend, and earning a very high freight. The master was a German of Rostock, Friedrich Schwartz by

name, who for the wage of £10 per month was filling this onerous position to the exclusion of an Englishman, who thought such a post deserved better pay. The chief officer, unfortunately for him, was a Liverpool man, with a little money of his own, who could therefore afford to cut rates as well as the Germans. Every other member of the ship's company, except the two worthies above-mentioned and a couple of *Warspite* lads, was a "ja-for-yes man" as Jack impartially denominates Scandinavians and Teutons alike.

When the *St. George* left the East India Docks, the managing director (she belonged to a single-ship company whereof none of the shareholders knew anything of the shipping business) chuckled to himself to think how cheaply she was manned, and hurried back to Billiter Street to calculate his commission on the outward passage. The political outlook was very gloomy. Germany was growing more insolently aggressive every day, and the omniscient Kaiser smiled grimly as he read the latest report of the British Registrar-General of Seamen. He was naturally delighted to see how completely the British nation was handing over the control of its vast mercantile marine to foreign officers and seamen, all of whom were trained naval men, and capable of immediately utilising any sudden opportunity of dealing Britain a deadly blow.

At the time alluded to at the opening of this story, the *St. George*, under a towering mountain

of canvas, was bowling rapidly through the north-east Trades towards the Line. Needless, perhaps, to say that the Britons on board were having an uncomfortable time of it. The mate was made to feel at every turn that he was an interloper. Although his country's flag sheltered him, Captain Schwartz's contempt for England and all that belonged to her was freely vented in his hearing. And all conversation on board, as well as most of the orders, being in German, Mr. Brown and his four compatriots felt that they were indeed aliens on sufferance. Like the majority of their countrymen, they knew no language but their own, which in the present instance was as well for their small remainder of mental peace. The two A.B.s had at least one advantage over the mate, they could talk to each other, though every "work-up" job was sorted out to them, their treatment being just the same as the two boys.

So the days dragged wearily on until one morning a streak of smoke on the northern horizon gradually resolved itself into a splendid armoured cruiser that overhauled the *St. George* as if she were at anchor instead of logging twelve knots easy. With a bird-like swoop the flyer sheered up under her quarter, showing the white ensign at her standard. Up went the good old "blood and guts" of Old England at the *St. George's* peak in reply, and to the incisive sea-queries from the cruiser's bridge, Mr. Brown shouted back the information required as to port

of destination, length of passage, etc. Then came ringing across the startling message, "War is declared between England and Germany. But you're all right, I hope. There is little danger to be apprehended from German warships. Still, be careful, and crack on all you know if you do see a suspicious-looking craft. Good-bye," and the majestic vessel sheered off at top speed for the westward.

"Ha, mein verdammt Englischer schweinhund, dot ju are, hou ju feel yoost now, hein? Gott bewahr; ju haf komm to ein ent mit yourselluf, aind id? Ve schou ju somedings now, und tond ju forkedd id." Thus the triumphant skipper, accompanying his jeers at the mate with a horrible grimace at the brilliant flag floating proudly overhead, and an emphatic expectoration on the white deck. Then, excited beyond measure, he rushed to the break of the poop and yelled a summons in German for all hands. Aft they came, tumbling over one another in their eagerness, and ranged themselves before the saloon doors. On his lofty platform above their heads the rampant skipper raved, stamped, gesticulated, and finally burst sonorously into song, "Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles," all hands, with the miserable exception of the handful of English, joining vociferously in his pæan of triumph.

Thenceforward, a further development of scurvy treatment took place. The mate was no longer allowed access to the chronometer, or

permitted to "take the sun," or work up the ship's position. The log-book was also taken from him, the young third mate given charge of his watch, and he was made to take his meals alone in his berth. Neither he nor the two English A.B.s were allowed to come on the poop any more, so that they were completely in the dark as to the position of the ship within hundreds of miles, as from never seeing the compass they could only guess generally how she was steering. Spiritlessly the luckless islanders wearily worried on from day to day, the butt of all their exulting shipmates. When the Kaiser's birthday came round, and the ship was put *en fête*, they were bidden sarcastically to rejoice over the change of affairs. But with the hoisting of an immense German flag at the peak they lost all control of themselves, bursting into a fury of passionate tears, mingled with curses upon their enemies. They were immediately set upon by the whole crowd, and after a few minutes of desperate fighting were overpowered, heavily ironed, and flung into the forepeak on the coals, bruised from head to heel. Many and bitter were their regrets as they lay on their easeless couch. Scarcely less venomous were their curses on the fatuous folly of the rulers who had suffered such an event as this to become possible than on their brutal gaolers. For as Joe muttered scornfully, "Tain't 'sif they hain't been told of it. It's been drummed into their yeers long 'nough, God knows, 'n all they ever sed wuz, 'Oh, yore

ezaggeratin'. The pussentidge uv furriners in the British mercantile marine ain't anythin' like so high az you say."

"'Seems 'bout's high's we want, anyway," said Bill dreamily, while the poor mate ground his teeth but never said a word.

What puzzled them all greatly was the length of time the ship seemed to be getting into cold weather. From the time the cruiser spoke them, when they were in about 15 degrees N., was now more than a month, and with the winds they had carried they should have been running their easting down in about 40 degrees S. But they were still in tropical weather. At last the mate broke a long silence by saying: "I believe he's making for Walvisch Bay. 'Shouldn't wonder if there's some German warships there or thereabouts. I only hope he *is* trying to get there, an' one of our cruisers sights him. It's about our only chance."

Several days passed and still they were kept close prisoners in the black, stifling hole, starving on a trifle of hard tack and water, and sinking deeper every day into a very gulf of despair. At last, to the practised senses of the captives, it was evident that something was afoot. She had hove to. On deck the Deutschers were in trouble. As the mate had surmised, they were bound for Walvisch Bay, carrying every rag they could crowd on her, seeing that every hour they were out of port now on this unusual course was brimful of danger. The skipper scarcely ever

left the deck, and his eyes were bleared and burning with constant glaring through his glasses for a possible pursuer.

H.M.S. *Scourge*, 22-knot cruiser, was on her passage to Simon's Town with urgent stores for the squadron off that station. Her orders were—"All possible dispatch," yet, when the look-out one afternoon reported a heavily-rigged four-master standing to the eastward in latitude twenty-three degrees south, her commander felt justified in altering her course sufficiently to bring him in touch with this phenomenon. The stranger was making grand headway under all canvas to a heavy south-east Trade, but the speed of the cruiser was fully two knots to her one. In about an hour, therefore, from sighting her, the *Scourge* ranged sufficiently near to inquire by signal for the usual information. But the merchantman was so slow with his answers that before two sets had been hoisted the vessels were within hail of each other. "Where are you bound to?" roared the commander of the cruiser. A dramatic pause succeeded, in which all eyes on board both ships were centred upon the skipper of the *St. George*. At last the reluctant answer came, "Walvisch Bay." "The devil you are," said the naval captain; "I must have a closer look at you." A couple of abrupt orders, and a well-manned cutter, with the first-lieutenant in charge, was bounding across the few fathoms of sea towards the *St. George*, with instructions to ascertain the bottom

facts of this mystery. Arriving alongside, the officer sprang on board, and, quickly mounting the poop, confronted Captain Schwartz, whose face was a study of conflicting emotions. Already the lieutenant had noticed the Teutonic appearance of everybody on deck, and the captain's working face deepened the suspicions aroused. "I wish to examine your papers, sir," said he quietly to the scowling skipper. "Vat for, sir?" was the almost expected reply. For all answer the lieutenant strode to the side and blew a small whistle, which brought six of his boat's crew bounding on board in an instant. "Now, sir," he said, turning again to the skipper, "my time is precious, and my orders precise. Kindly lead the way into your cabin, and produce your documents, or I must search for them without you." The baffled Teuton still hesitating, the naval officer, with a slight gesture of impatience, beckoned his men aft. They came on the jump, but one of them stepping forward in advance of his fellows, saluted, and said, "Beg pardon, sir, but we just heard some voices forrard a-cryin' 'Help!' and it sounded 's if they wus cooped up somewheres." A dark frown settled upon the officer's face as he replied, sternly, "Three of you go forrard and search; the others come below here with me." But before he stepped into the companion-way he blew two sharp notes on his whistle, a signal which was immediately answered by the cruiser sending another cutter alongside with a fully-armed crew.

In the meantime the search aft had revealed the ship's papers, which showed of course that the *St. George* had cleared from London for Melbourne. The skipper's private journal in German was also impounded. With the documents under his arm the lieutenant returned on deck, just as the search party forward emerged from the fore-peak bringing their hapless countrymen to light. Orders were immediately issued to place all the foreigners under arrest, but the skipper was nowhere to be seen. A search for him was ordered at once, but the words had hardly been spoken when, with an awful roar, the whole beautiful fabric was rent into a myriad fragments ; an immense volume of dense smoke rose sullenly into the clear air, and the sparkling sea was bestrewn with the mangled remains of friend and foe alike.

The desperate skipper had chosen, rather than give up his ill-gotten prize, to fire the great store of powder under the main-hatch, involving himself and his captors in one awful fate. A great wave raised by the gigantic explosion made even the stately cruiser roll and stagger as if in a heavy gale, but all her boats were in the water in a trice, making search for any trace of life among the wreckage.

Not one was saved, and with a company of heavy-hearted men she resumed her passage bearing the terrible news of the loss of the *St. George.*

XXIII

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MERCHANT SERVICE

At intervals, ever since the issue of the last report of the Registrar-General of Shipping and Seamen, there have been appearing in the press items of comment upon the significant tables set forth in that most interesting document. But one feature has been painfully evident in all of them—the inability to appreciate, from a merchant seaman's point of view, the underlying lessons that report contained.

This, though much to be regretted, can scarcely be wondered at when we remember the limitations, the inarticulateness, of the class referred to. Here it may be as well to state that in what follows the terms "ship," "officer," and "seaman," are to be understood as referring solely to the Mercantile Marine, unless otherwise stated—a necessary warning, since eight out of every ten landsmen always confound the two services, mercantile and naval.

First in importance, as well as in interest, to seamen is the question of personnel. It is much to the credit of the Navy League that it is wide

awake to the dangers besetting this country through the increasing numbers of foreign seamen manning our ships. But it does not appear as if even the Navy League fully realises to what extent our cargo-carriers have been handed over to the foreigner. A very extended acquaintance with the various trades is absolutely necessary in order to understand the reason why the percentages shown in the Board of Trade return do not reveal the true state of affairs. As they stand, the percentage of foreign able-seamen to British (excluding Lascars) in foreign-going sailing ships is shown to be as high as 48.6. Taking steam and sailing ships together, the percentage falls to 35.5, for reasons which will presently appear. Now, one would naturally expect (what proves indeed to be the case) that our coasters and fishermen would be almost entirely British. And we may go a step further, and declare that these hardy fellows are the fine flower of our seamen, as stalwart and capable as ever British seamen were. With them may be classed the fishermen, hovellers, and beachmen generally of our coasts, who, though not classed as seamen, may fearlessly challenge comparison with any seafarers in the wide world. Among all these the foreigner finds little or no room wherein to thrust himself, nor is there apparently much danger that he ever will. Next to these in order of immunity from foreign interference come the great steamship lines, other than those trading to the Far East, whose crews are

almost exclusively composed of Lascars and Chinese, with British officers. To the former belong such great undertakings as the "Cunard," the "Union," the "Castle," and the "Pacific" Companies. In these splendid vessels the Britisher tenaciously holds his own, in whatever part of the ship you seek him. The food is good, pay is fair, accommodation is comfortable, and a high state of discipline is maintained. Consequently, these ships are eagerly sought after by the better class of seamen, who will be found making voyage after voyage in the same vessel, or at least in the same line.

But having thus briefly dismissed the almost exclusively British-manned branches of the Mercantile Marine, we are met by a vastly different state of affairs at once.

Ocean Tramps

Go to one of the shipping offices when a sailing ship is "signing on," and watch the skipper's contemptuous look as he scrutinises a steamboat man's discharge just handed to him. "I want sailors, not navvies," he shouts, as he scornfully flings it back. Therefore a "sailor man" gives them a wide berth if he can. And then the conditions of life on board these tanks effectually bar decent Britons out of them. The few that are found in them generally belong to that unhappy class of men who get drunk at every opportunity,

and must go when their money is done in whatever presents itself. They would sail in a sieve with the devil for a skipper. The rule is, however, for these vessels to be manned by a motley crowd of what Jack calls "dagoes,"—Latins of all kinds, the scum of the Levant, with a sprinkling of Scandinavians, but not many. It speaks volumes for the skill and pluck of the officers unfortunate enough to be responsible for such ships, that so few casualties occur in comparison with their number; for it is no uncommon thing for a tramp of a thousand tons or so to be wallowing along through a pitch-black night, the whole watch on deck consisting of the officer in charge and three men, no one of whom is able to understand the other. One is at the wheel, one is on the look-out, and the other "stands by to never mind." The kennel below is filthy,—a parti-coloured halo round the reeking grease-pot that serves for a lamp eloquently testifying to the condition of the atmosphere. The food is in keeping with the rest, where provided by the ship; but in a large number of cases these are "weekly boats"; that is, the men are paid by the week and "find" themselves,—an arrangement that lends itself to some extraordinary developments of mixed messes and semi-starvation among such a strange medley of races. I knew a weekly boat once that signed in London for a Mediterranean voyage, but was chartered in Smyrna to take pilgrims to Jeddah. The fellows cut their purchases very fine, as it was for the trip,

but owing to their stores being stolen by the starving pilgrims, they were in such a plight when they left Suez that it was a miracle they did not share the fate of fifty-five of their passengers, who resigned their pilgrimage on the passage, and found rest among the sharks. Other things happened, too, more true than tellable, which would almost serve as an appendix to the *Inferno*. These vessels are mostly owned by single-ship companies, a dozen or so of which will be managed by some enterprising broker, who makes a fortune, although the shareholders rarely see dividends. Under such conditions of ownership there is no room for wonder that these tramps are what they are.

Much Canvas and Few Men

Many intelligent people are possessed by the idea that steam is rapidly driving the sailing-ship from the sea. If they would only take a stroll round the docks they would alter their views. For certain trades and some kinds of cargo the steamer, let her be built, found, and manned as cheaply as the 'cutest single-ship manager can contrive, cannot possibly compete with the sailing-ship. And of late years it has been found possible to add enormously to the size of sailing-ships without increasing the cost of their working to any extent. Four-masted ships have become plentiful, carrying an area of canvas which would have seemed incredible to the seamen of fifty years

ago, accustomed as they were to the flying clippers of Britain and America. These vessels are as handsome as the tramp steamer is hideous, their graceful lines, taut spars, and spidery rigging all lending themselves to beauty. But in these, as in the tramps, the foreigner is paramount. The ghastly farce (to a sailor) of labour-saving appliances has enabled the owners to reduce the crew lists to such an extent that in the majority of these ships all hands are barely enough for an efficient watch. The only change which has been found workable in the management of the larger sails above the courses is an American invention. It consists of splitting a sail in half horizontally, and was long applied to the topsails only, their unwieldy depth having always made them exceedingly difficult to handle. With the growth in size of ships and sails the top-gallant-sails have been also halved, and this alteration is now very general. But the comparative ease with which these sails can be handled, as compared with what used to be the case, has naturally tempted officers anxious to make a passage to "hang on" longer than they used to, depending upon their ability to get sail in quickly at the last moment. That was all very well when a crew was carried sufficient in numbers to do what was required of them. But when eight such struggling monsters as a 3000-ton ship's to'gallant-s'ls are have to be furled at once in a gale of wind by eighteen men (supposing all hands are called), it is quite another matter. Few experiences are

more awful than those gained by being on a yard with a handful of men trying to master two or three thousand yards of No. 1 canvas in what sailors call a "breeze of wind,"—off the Horn, for instance, in a blinding snowstorm, with the canvas like a plank for stiffness, and rising far above your head in a solid round of white, into which you vainly try to force your half-frozen fingers.

The Dutchman

There is a great temptation to enlarge upon this theme, but it must be sternly suppressed, my object being solely to show how a scanty crew list adds to the miseries of the sailor. Not only so, but the food is so uniformly, unpardonably bad that British seamen will not put up with it a day longer than they can help. They get out of it the first opportunity that presents itself, and the Dutchman, as Jack impartially designates Germans and Scandinavians alike, comes in. In such vessels as I have been describing he is found in a proportion of at least 85 per cent. And not only as common seamen, but as officers, masters, mates, and tradesmen. In these ships are to be found the 180 captains, 512 mates, 637 boatswains, 1304 carpenters, 277 sailmakers, and 2321 cooks and stewards of foreign birth admittedly sailing in British vessels, according to the Registrar-General. A very potent reason for this is to be found in the peculiar conditions of discipline, or rather want of

discipline, obtaining on board these ships. Bad food, short-handedness, and miserable quarters make British Jack, never too amenable to discipline, kick over the traces. When he does, which is not infrequently, what remedy has his superior officer? Practically none. Handcuffs are carried, but with an all too scanty crew already that coercive measure is barred. American methods of "booting" and "belaying-pin soup" are also out of the question, for Jack knows enough of the Merchant Shipping Act to make him a dangerous customer to assault. Personal violence towards a seaman on the high seas renders an officer liable to lose his certificate, even if he gets a present advantage in the sudden civility of the person assaulted. Again, the scanty number of officers carried in proportion to the crew is a powerful argument against the use of physical force. So dangerous a weapon ought never to be used at sea unless it is sure to be effectual. And yet, failing personal violence, there are no means by which an officer can enforce obedience to his orders. Refusal to obey orders, often accompanied by the foulest abuse, is one of the commonest of experiences at sea in British sailing ships, for which gross outrage the master's only legal remedy is to note the offence in the official log, and on the ship's arrival in port get a magistrate to sanction fining the offender a portion of his pay varying from two days' to a month's wages.

Between British seamen anxious to leave the

sea and captains eager to ship Dutchmen, the miserable remnant of our countrymen manning "deep-water" ships steadily dwindles. Those that remain are mostly like Sterne's starling, or else they are hopeful youngsters who, having served their time in some singly-owned hooker, and passed for second mate, sail before the mast in hope of picking up a berth abroad. They cannot live at home in idleness wearing away the dock roads looking for berths which are all filled up by those possessing influence of some kind with the owners, so they put in their time as A.B.s and live in hope. This, however, is not all. Not content with supplying our forecastles, the Dutchmen kindly furnish us with officers as well. I have been before the mast in a ship, the *Orpheus* of Greenock, where the chief mate was a Liverpool man, who, with a Welsh A.B. and myself, represented the entire British element on board. Her crew numbered twenty-four all told. Doubtless I shall hear that this was a marvellously exceptional case, but I beg to differ—it is all too common.

The "Boy"

Another curious feature of the manning of our ships is especially noticed by the Registrar-General —the way in which young British seamen leave the sea-life at the earliest opportunity. His unemotional remark, that "as 'sailors' do not ordinarily enter the sea-service after they are twenty-five

years of age, this falling off in the number of its young British sailors affects the source of supply of our future petty officers and able seamen," is full of the gravest warning, which has, however, apparently passed unheeded. Out of the various training ships[1] there pass every year a very large number of lads into the mercantile marine, who have received at least an insight into the conditions of a sailor's life as it should be. They are taught habits of obedience, cleanliness, and regularity, and in some cases have actual acquaintance with the working of small vessels under way. When they are considered to be fairly competent to do all that is likely to be required of them, they are taken in hand by an official whose duty it is to find ships for them. In due time they sign as "boys," generally in sailing ships, and away they go to sea. To their utter amazement they find the life has scarcely anything in common with that which they have been used to. In the first place, they miss most painfully the abundance of good plain food. Then they have been used to cleanliness of the strictest kind, both in body and clothes. Now they are fortunate if they can obtain the eighth share of a bucket of fresh water once a week, unless rain falls. Their duties have been regular, their periods of rest unbroken ; now they have as many masters as there are hands on board, and they never know what to do next. They have been under a regular system of tuition ;

[1] This does not apply to cadet ships, such as the *Worcester* and *Conway*.

now, if they learn anything, it is because they are determined to do so in spite of difficulties which are only to be overcome by such indomitable perseverance as one can hardly expect from a boy. And lastly, they are thrown into the intimate society of a group of men who, generally speaking, have but one topic of conversation, one mode of speech—the worst possible. They are continually being told that nobody but a fool goes to sea, that it is the life of a convict, with worse food and lodging, and that they had better sweep a crossing ashore. Consequently they are ever on the look-out for a way of escape, and the great majority succeed in finding one before very long.

The Naval Reserve

This brings me to a most important part of the subject, the question of merchant seamen as a reserve for the Navy. There can be no doubt that the institution of the Royal Naval Reserve was a grand idea, but there are grave doubts as to the way in which it is being carried out. As far as its officers are concerned, its success can hardly be disputed, though there may be more truth than is palatable in the assertion that Naval officers look down with much contempt upon the gallant merchantmen who become R.N.R. lieutenants. Whether that be so or not, I am sure that Naval officers would be the first to recognise the value of R.N.R lieutenants if ever their services were

needed, and any lingering feeling of superiority would soon give place to admiration. But the men, the rank and file, who are each paid a substantial retaining fee yearly, besides a guinea a week for six weeks' annual drill? I speak under correction as trenching upon a matter with which I have had small acquaintance, but I believe that drill is usually put in on board of an ancient hulk, with obsolete weapons, and that very few of the men have any acquaintance whatever with the actual conditions of service on board a sea-going vessel of war. If I am right in this contention, then this most valuable body of men are running to waste, and would be no more fit to take their places on board a man-o'-war than they would be to start cabinet-making. And if this be so in the case of Royal Naval Reserve men, what can be said of those outside that experimental force? Except that he would be hardly likely to get sea-sick, the merchant seaman suddenly transferred to (let us say) a first-class battleship would feel as much out of his element as any landsman, more so than an engine-fitter or a man accustomed to some of our big machine-shops. To use the same words, but in a very different sense, that I used about the tramp-steamer crews, a man-of-warsman (blue-jacket) is not a sailor at all now. He is a marine artilleryman with a fine knowledge of boat handling, but a spanner is fitter for his fist than a marlinspike. He lives in the heart of a bewildering complication of engineering contrivances, to

which the mazy web of a sailing-ship's top hamper is as simple as a child's box of bricks. He is accustomed to the manipulation of masses of metal so huge as to excite the awe-stricken wonder of the ordinary citizen who is not an engineer. And familiarity with packages of death-dealing explosives renders him as contemptuously indifferent to their potentialities of destruction as if they were sand or sawdust. And, most important of all, long and rigid training has made him one of the smartest men in the world, able to act at the word of command like a pinion in a machine, at the right moment, in the right way, yet with that intelligence no machine can ever possess.

The Intelligent Foreigner

Talk about the average merchant seamen filling up gaps in the ranks of men like these is almost too much for one's patience on the part of those whose business it is to know ; it is criminal stupidity. Now in France every merchant seaman must perforce spend a large proportion of his time in the Navy, so that their reserve is always available. And that is one reason why France strives so eagerly to foster her Mercantile Marine even at such crushing cost to her long-suffering taxpayers. In the event of war with us, however, she would be in a far different position, because she could exist without a merchant ship at sea, and all their crews would be ready for service in the Navy.

What should we do ? Even supposing that all our merchant seamen were capable of taking their places on board of men-of-war if called upon, who would man the fleets of food-carriers ? Accepting as rigidly correct the proportions shown by the official document already quoted, the percentage of foreign seamen in all foreign-going vessels was two years ago 35.5, and admittedly increasing rapidly. Would it be wise to withdraw from the merchant ships the stiffening of British subjects they now carry and replace them by aliens ? I firmly believe that the danger limit has long been passed in the exclusively cargo-carrying trades, which, after all, are our very backbone. What this great army of aliens will do in the event of our going to war with one or two European Powers is a problem of undeniable gravity. But given a fine ship with a valuable cargo, with officers and crew nearly all German, what might they reasonably be expected to do ? Failing an answer, I submit that the temptation to transfer the ship to their own flag would be very great. And it is a needless risk. Let it be granted that the alien officer or skipper is a good man, better educated most likely, a good seaman, and that he is cheap. All these qualities except the educational one (which is, after all, not so important to our officers as it is to the foreigner) our officers possess in just as great measure, while as for the price—well, I have seen half-a-dozen chief mates tumbling over one another for the chance of shipping in a 1200-ton Baltic

tramp steamer at £5 : 10s. a month. They could not be much cheaper than that, unless they got the same wages as the crew. And I know of English skippers of sea-going steamers out of London who are getting £10 a month. Poor men, they are cheap enough!

To sum up as briefly as possible all the foregoing remarks : It seems clear to me, as it has done to all intelligent seamen that I have ever met, that very little legislation is needed to make the British Mercantile Marine popular again among our own countrymen. Legislation has hitherto done little for the sailor, while it has exasperated the shipowner, already handicapped as none of his foreign rivals have ever been. The Mercantile Marine should more nearly approximate to the Navy in many of its details, which need not entail extra expense or annoyance to the shipowner. It should be made possible for a shipmaster to ensure better discipline, but he should be able to give his men better food and better housing. The Board of Trade scale of provisions is a hateful abomination ; it ought to be blotted out and a sensible dietary substituted, which need not exceed it in cost, while it would act like a charm upon seamen, for whom it has an importance undreamed of by those ashore, who even on the slenderest incomes can fare every day in a manner luxurious by comparison with our sailors. More attention should be paid to the men's quarters. Here, again, expenses need not be raised ; a little attention to detail in drawing up

specifications would make a vast difference. *And none but a naturalised British subject should be permitted to sign articles in a British ship.* This plan is pursued with advantage in American vessels, which, like our own, carry an enormous percentage of foreigners of all nations. Of undermanning I need say nothing more, because the question is being dealt with, and will, I earnestly hope, be settled with as much satisfaction to everybody concerned as the splendid "Midge" scheme, the only piece of marine legislation that I can remember that has been completely successful. Unfortunately, under present conditions it is responsible for the still further depletion of our Mercantile Marine of British seamen, since numbers of them by its beneficent operations reach their homes with their hard-earned pay intact. This enables them to look about for a job ashore where they are known, whereas under the bad old conditions they would have been in a few days again "outward bound with a stocking round their necks," as Jack tersely sums up the situation of a man who has squandered all his money, been robbed of, or has sold, all his clothes, and is off to sea again in the first craft that he can get, going he neither knows nor cares whither.

XXIV

CANCER CAY

THERE is a tiny islet on the outskirts of the Solomon Archipelago that to all such casual wanderers as stray so far presents not a single feature of interest. Like scores of others in those latitudes, it has not yet attained to the dignity of a single coco-nut tree, although many derelict nuts have found a lodgment upon it, and begun to grow, only to be wiped out of existence at the next spring-tide. Viewed from a balloon it would look like a silly-season mushroom, but with a fringe of snowy foam around it marking the protecting barrier to which it owes its existence, to say nothing of its growth. Yet of all places in the world which I have been privileged to visit, this barren little mound of sand clings most tenaciously to my memory, for reasons which will presently appear.

One of those devastating cyclones that at long intervals sweep across the Pacific, leaving a long swath of destruction in their wake, had overtaken the pearling schooner of which I was mate.

For twenty-four hours we fled before it, we knew not whither, not daring to heave-to. The only compass we possessed had been destroyed by the first sea that broke on board. Whether it was night or day we had no notion, except by watch, and even then we were doubtful, so appalling was the darkness. Hope was beginning to revive that, as the *Papalangi* had proved herself so staunch, she might yet "run it out," unless she hit something. But the tiny rag rigged forrard to keep her before it suddenly flew into threads; the curl of the sea caught her under the counter and spun her up into the wind like a teetotum. The next vast comber took her broadside-on, rolled her over, and swallowed her up. We went "down quick into the pit."

Although always reckoned a powerful swimmer, even among such amphibia as the Kanakas, I don't remember making a stroke. But after a horrible, choking struggle in the black uproar I got my breath again, finding myself clinging, as a drowning man will, to something big and seaworthy. It was an ordinary ship's hencoop that the skipper had bought cheap from a passenger vessel in Auckland. As good a raft as one could wish, it bore me on over the mad sea, half dead as I was, until I felt it rise high as if climbing a cataract and descend amidst a furious boiling of surf into calm, smooth water. A few minutes later I touched a sandy beach. Utterly done up, I slept where I lay, at the water's edge, though the

shrieking hurricane raged overhead as if it would tear the land up by the roots.

When I awoke it was fine weather, though to leeward the infernal reek of the departing meteor still disfigured a huge segment of the sky. I looked around, and my jaw dropped. Often I had wondered what a poor devil *would* do who happened to be cast away on such a spot as this. Apparently I was about to learn. A painful pinch at my bare foot startled me, and I saw an ugly beast of a crab going for me. He was nearly a foot across, his blue back covered with long spikes, and his wicked little eyes seemed to have an expression of diabolical malignity. I snatched at a handful of his legs and swung him round my head, dashing him against the side of my coop with such vigour that his armour flew to flinders around me. I never have liked crab, even when dressed, but I found the raw flesh of that one tasty enough—it quite smartened me up. Having eaten heartily, I took a saunter up the smooth knoll of sand, aimlessly, I suppose, for it was as bare as a plate, without a stone or a shell. From its highest point, about ten feet above high-water mark, I looked around, but my horizon was completely bounded by the ring of breakers aforesaid. I felt like the scorpion within the fiery circle, and almost as disposed to sting myself to death had I possessed the proper weapon. As I stood gazing vacantly at the foaming barrier and solemn enclosing dome of fleckless blue, I was again

surprised by a vicious nip at my foot. There was another huge crab boldly attacking me—me, a vigorous man, and not a sodden corpse, as yet. I felt a grue of horror run all down my back, but I grabbed at the vile thing and hurled it from me half across the island. Then I became aware of others arriving, converging upon me from all around, and I was panic-stricken. For one mad moment I thought of plunging into the sea again; but reason reasserted itself in time, reminding me that, while I had certain advantages on my side where I was, in the water I should fall a helpless victim at once, if, as might naturally be expected, these ghouls were swarming there. Not a weapon of any kind could I see, neither stick nor stone. My feelings of disgust deepened into despair. But I got little time for thought. Such a multitude of the eerie things were about me that I was kept most actively employed seizing them and flinging them from me. They got bolder, feinting and dodging around me, but happily without any definite plan of campaign among them. Once I staggered forward, having trodden unaware upon a spiky back as I sprung aside, wounding my foot badly. I fell into a group of at least twenty, crushing some of them, but after a painful struggle among those needle-like spines regained my feet with several clinging to my body. A kind of frenzy seized me, and, regardless of pain, I clutched at them right and left, dashing them to fragments one against the other, until quite a pile

of writhing, dismembered enemies lay around me, while my hands and arms were streaming from numberless wounds. Very soon I became exhausted by my violent exertions and the intense heat, but, to my unfathomable thankfulness, the heap of broken crabs afforded me a long respite, the sound ones finding congenial occupation in devouring them. While I watched the busy cannibals swarming over the yet writhing heap, I became violently ill, for imagination vividly depicted them rioting in my viscera. Vertigo seized me, I reeled and fell prone, oblivious to all things for a time.

When sense returned it was night. The broad moon was commencing her triumphal march among the stars, which glowed in the blue-black concave like globules of incandescent steel. My body was drenched with dew, a blessed relief, for my tongue was leathery and my lips were split with drouth. I tore off my shirt and sucked it eagerly, the moisture it held, though brackish, mitigating my tortures of thirst. Suddenly I bethought me of my foes, and looked fearfully around. There was not one to be seen, nothing near but the heap of clean-picked shells of those devoured. As the moon rose higher, I saw a cluster of white objects at a little distance, soon recognisable as boobies. They permitted me to snatch a couple of them easily, and wringing off their heads I got such a draught as put new life into me. Hope returned, even quelling the cruel thought of daylight bring-

ing again those ravening hordes of crawling crustacea. Yet my position was almost as hopeless as one could imagine. Unless, as I much doubted, this was a known spot for *bêche de mer* or pearl-shell fishers, there was but the remotest chance of my rescue, while, without anything floatable but my poor little hencoop, passing that barrier of breakers was impossible. Fortunately I have always tried to avoid meeting trouble half-way, and with a thankful feeling of present wants supplied, I actually went to sleep again, though stiff and sore from head to heel.

At daybreak I awoke again to a repetition of the agonies of the previous day, which, although I was better fortified to meet them, were greater than before. The numbers of my hideous assailants were more than doubled as far I could judge. The whole patch of sand seemed alive with the voracious vermin. So much so that when I saw the approach of those horrible hosts my heart sank, my flesh shrank on my bones, and I clutched at my throat. But I could not strangle myself, though had I possessed a knife I should certainly have chosen a swift exit from the unutterable horror of my position, fiercely as I clung to life. To be devoured piecemeal, retaining every faculty till the last—I could not bear the thought. There was no time for reflection, however ; the struggle began at once and continued with a pertinacity on the part of the crabs that promised a speedy end to it for me. How long it lasted I have no idea—

to my tortured mind it was an eternity. At last, overborne, exhausted, surrounded by mounds of those I had destroyed, over which fresh legions poured in ever-increasing numbers, earth and sky whirled around me, and I fell backward. As I went, with many of the vile things already clinging to me, I heard a yell—a human voice that revived my dulling senses like a galvanic shock. With one last flash of vigour I sprang to my feet, seeing as I did so a canoe with four Kanakas in it, not fifty yards away, in the smooth water between the beach and the barrier. Bounding like a buck, heedless of the pain as my wounded feet clashed among the innumerable spiky carapaces of my enemies, I reached the water, and hurled myself headlong towards that ark of safety. How I reached it I do not know, nor anything further until I returned to life again on board the *Warrigal* of Sydney, as weak as a babe and feeling a century older.

XXV

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY JONAH

We were gathered together in a compact group under the weather bulwarks of the old *Rainbow*, South Sea-man, presently cruising on the Line grounds; officers and harpooners of three ships engaged in the pleasant occupation of "gamming," as ship-visiting is termed among Southern-going whalemen. Song and dance were finished, and with pipes aglow, stretched at our ease, the time-honoured "cuffer" or yarn was going its soothing round.

The fourth officer of the *Rainbow*, a taciturn Englishman, whose speech and manner excited wonder as to how he came in that galley, was called upon in his turn to contribute. Without hesitation, as if professional story-telling was his *métier*, he began:

"'Ere she white water-r-rs! Ah blo-o-ow!' came ringing down from the main crow's nest of the *Megantic*, South Sea whaler of Martha's Vineyard, as she heeled solemnly to the steady

trade on the 'off-shore' ground one lovely morning.

"'Where away? Haow fer off?' roared the skipper, while, slinging his glasses, he prepared to elevate his sixteen stone painfully to the giddy height above him.

"'Two p'ints on the starb'rd baouw, sir, 'baout five mile off. Looks like sparm whale, sir,' was the prompt reply.

"'All right, keep her az she goes, Mr. Slocum, 'n' clar away boats,' said the 'old man,' as with many a grunt he began his pilgrimage of pain.

"There was no need to call all hands. The first cry had startled them into sudden activity. Before its echoes died away, they were on deck, with no trace of drowsiness among them. Being in a high state of discipline, each man went straight to his boat, standing ready, at the word, to lower and be off after the gambolling leviathan ahead. Silence reigned profound, except for the soothing murmur of the displaced sea as the lumbering old barky forged slowly ahead, or the soft flap of a hardly-drawing staysail as she rolled to windward. Seated upon the upper topsail yard, the 'old man' soliloquised grumblingly, 'What in the 'tarnal blazes 's he doin' of? Gaul bust my gol-dern skin ef ever *I* see sech a ninseck 'n *my* life. I be everlastin'ly frazzled ef 'taint mos' 's bad ez snakes in yer boots. Mr. Slocum, jes' shin up hyar a minit, won't ye?'

"As if unable to trust his own senses any

longer, he thus called upon the mate to help him out. More agile than the skipper in his movements, it was but a few seconds before Mr. Slocum was by his chief's side, peering with growing bewilderment through the binoculars at the strange object ahead. What had at first sight seemed an ordinary full-sized bull cachalot leisurely playing upon the surface of the sea, had now resolved itself into an indescribable, ever-shifting mass of matter, from the dark centre of which writhing arms continually protruded and retreated. The golden glare lavished along the glittering sea by the ascending sun added to the mystery surrounding the moving monster or monsters, for it or they lay right in the centre of that dazzling path.

"'Wall—whatjer mek ov it, Mr. Slocum?' queried the skipper sarcastically.

"Slowly, as if spelling his words, the mate replied, 'Thutty-nine year hev I ben a-fishin', but ef ever I see ennythin' like *that* befo', may I never pump sparm whale ag'in. Kaint fine no sorter name fer it, sir.'

"'Lemme see them glasses agen,' said the 'old man' wearily. ''Pears like 's if she's a-risin' it, whatever 'tes, consider'ble sudden;' and, readjusting the focus, he glued his eyes to the tubes again for another long searching look at the uncanny sight. His scrutiny was evidently more satisfying than at first, for without removing the glasses from his eyes, he yapped, ''Way down

frum aloft! Heave to,' n low'r away, Mr. Slocum. Guess yew'll fine a "fish" thar, er tharabout.'

"'Ay, ay, sir,' promptly returned the mate, departing with great alacrity, issuing orders the while, so that by the time he reached the deck there was a whirring rattle of patent sheaves, and a succession of subdued splashes, as boat after boat took the water. In almost as short a time as it takes to say it, the boats' masts were stepped, the big sails bellied out, and away sped the handsome craft, in striking contrast to the unlovely old hulk that had borne them.

"We were no 'greenies'; long practice had so familiarised us with the wiles and ferocity of the cachalot, that we had none of the tremors at approaching one that so sorely afflict beginners. Nevertheless there was an air of mystery about the present proceedings which affected all of us more or less, though no one knew precisely why. Absolute silence is the invariable rule, as you know, in boats going on a 'fish,' because of that exquisite sense of sound possessed by the sperm whale, which is something more than hearing; so we were slightly startled to hear our harpooner say in a clear undertone, 'Dern funny-lookin' fish that, Mr. Slocum, don't ye think?' But for all answer our chief growled, 'Stand up, José!'

"Instantly the big fellow sprang to his feet in attitude to strike, balancing his weapon, a heroic figure sharply outlined against the clear blue.

"Good Lord! what was that? A horrible

medley of blue-black and livid white, an inextricable tangle of writhing, clutching, tearing, serpent-like arms, that lashed the sea into a curious dusky foam, evil-smelling and greasy. Out of its midst rose an immense globular mass, bearing two eyes larger than barrel-heads, dead black, yet with a Satanic expression that confused one's heart-beats.

"'Giv't to him! giv't to him!' roared the mate, and instantly the iron flew into the midst of the wallowing entanglement, followed immediately by another from José's eager, nervous arms. Willing hands clutched the flapping sail to roll it up, but a shriek of agony paralysed them all. A long livid thing rose on the off side of the boat, and twining itself around the wretched harpooner's tall figure, tore him from our midst, his heart-broken death-yell curdling our blood. Quick as thought, another of those awful arms came gliding over us, this time encircling the boat amidships. Though tapering to the slenderest of points, it was of the circumference of a man's body at its thickest, and armed with saucer-like mouths all along its inferior surface. One of these clung to my bare breast as the slimy horror tightened round us, a ring of great curved claws which protruded from it tearing at my flesh as if to strip it from the bones. But we had hardly realised what was happening, when she was going over, parbuckled as you might turn a hand-bowl. In a moment all was darkness and struggle for breath amidst a very maelström of slime and stench, in the depths of

which I felt myself freed from that frightful grip. It seemed like hours before, with a bound, I reached the surface again, clutching at something hard and floating as I rose. In spite of the excruciating agony of my wounds, and the rushing of the air into my collapsed lungs, there was a sense of relief beyond expression, as of resurrection from the dead.

"Although counted a good swimmer even among such amphibia as our crew, I lay there supine, stretched at length upon the sea—a still, white figure grasping numbly at the fragment of bottom-board. Suddenly I became aware of a whirling in the water again, but I was in a sort of stupor of the physical faculties, though mentally alert enough.

"Then up reared above my head an object I recognised with a long wail of terror; the tremendous lower jaw of the sperm whale, bristling with its double row of gleaming teeth. Before I could gasp a prayer, or even think what was happening, I was gliding down the vast grey cavern of his throat, with but one thought left—'the descent into Hell is easy.' Down, down I went into utter darkness, among a squirming, fetid heap of snaky coils, that enveloped me, and seemed to gnaw and tear at my shuddering body as if devouring me at second hand. Then came an explosion—a dull, rending report that sent an earthquake shock through me and my unutterable surroundings. Immediately following this

there was a convulsive upheaval, in which all the contents of that awful place took a rising motion, growing faster and faster, until, with a roaring rush, came the dear daylight again.

"What ensued then for some time I do not know. A sensation of heavenly peace and calm possessed me, when, as if released from some unimaginable nightmare, I found myself floating placidly as a Medusa upon a calm sea. There I felt content to lie, without effort, conscious only of life—life so sweet that I wondered dreamily whether I was still in the body, or had passed into that blissful state imagined by speculative psychologists as awaiting man after death. Gradually my mind became clearer, my limbs felt willing to obey the impulse of my brain. I began to swim, feebly at first, almost automatically, but with increasing vigour as the significance of my position became clearer to me.

"I had swum but a short distance when the blessed sound of my shipmates' voices greeted my ears, but from my lowly position I was unable to see them, until one of them gripped me by the arms, dragging me into the boat among them.

"Then I learned without surprise that I was the only survivor of my boat's crew. Every one of my fellows had disappeared before the horror-stricken gaze of the men in the other boats, who, being but a short distance astern of us, had witnessed the whole tragedy. It appeared that we had attacked a cachalot in the act of devouring

one of the gigantic cuttle-fish, or 'squid,' upon which these cetaceans feed, and of which it is most probable no mortal eye has yet beheld a full-sized specimen. For they inhabit the middle depths of oceans, never coming to the surface voluntarily.

"This monster's arms, or tentacles, enlaced the whole colossal body of the whale, so that they must have been fully 60 feet or 70 feet in length. At their junction with the head they were about 5 feet in girth, as a huge fragment lying at the bottom of the boat conclusively proved. At the time we so rashly attacked the whale the mighty mollusc must have been in his death-throes, for immediately after our boat's disappearance the whale 'sounded.' When, a minute or two later, he rose again to the surface, the other boats' crews saw him busily turning over and over, as if collecting the scattered fragments of his late victim. At that time they had not noticed me among the various flotsam, but it must have been then that I vanished down the capacious gullet of the voracious cetacean. Fortunately for me they were furiously bent upon attacking the whale, and so in some degree avenging their slain shipmates.

"The second mate had loaded his bomb-gun with an extra heavy charge, and at the same moment that the harpooner darted his weapon the bomb was discharged also. It penetrated the cachalot's lungs, inflicting a mortal wound by its explosion therein, the noise of which was the shock that I felt while in that horrible tomb. As is

usual, in his dying agony the whale ejected the whole contents of his stomach, by means of which cataclysm I was expelled therefrom and restored to the upper world once more. But had it not been for long and severe practice in diving, taken while pearl-fishing in Polynesia, enabling me to compete successfully with Kanakas, who almost live in the water, and even to outdo them at times, I must have been suffocated. The only time I was ever before so distressed for breath was in Levuka, when mate of a schooner. Our anchor fouled a rock in eight fathoms of water, and we could by no means persuade any of our natives to attempt its release. Rather than lose the fair chance of sailing that day I tried the dangerous task, succeeding after a desperate struggle, but regaining the surface with blood streaming from mouth, nose, and ears.

"I lay back in the stern-sheets of the boat feeling cruelly exhausted, the pain of my ghastly wound becoming continually more severe. But, even pre-occupied as I was, I could hardly fail to notice a want of cordiality towards me among my shipmates. An uncomfortable silence prevailed, depressing and unusual. It was not due to the natural solemnity following upon the sudden loss of five of our number, cut off in the prime of their health and strength, for, until I had told the wonderful story of my going down into Sheol, their demeanour had been very different. I looked appealingly and wonderingly from one to

the other, but could not meet any eye. They were all furtively averted with intent to avoid my gaze.

"To my relief we reached the ship speedily I was assisted on board gently enough, and led aft to where the skipper was roaming restlessly athwart the quarter-deck, like a caged animal. I was allowed to sit down while he examined me keenly as to the occurrences of the day. The gloom deepened on his face as I recounted all that I could remember of the fate of my unfortunate shipmates, until, my tale being told, he began, in curt, half-angry fashion, to question me about my antecedents. Not liking his manner, besides feeling faint and ill, I gave him but little information on that head.

"Then he burst out into petulant disconnected sentences, in bitter regrets for the lost men, blame of everybody generally, and at last, as if his predominant thought could no longer be restrained, shouted, 'I wish ter God A'mighty I'd never seen y'r face aboard my ship. Man an' boy I b'en spoutin' fer over forty year, an' never see, no, ner hearn tell ov, sech a hell-fire turn out. Yew'r a Jonah, thet's wut yew air, an' the sooner we get shet ov ye the better it'll be fer all han's, an' the more likely we sh'l be to hev *some* luck.'

"This was such a crusher that I did not attempt to reply, nor, owing to my condition, did I quite realise the full brutality and injustice of the man as I might otherwise have done. I crept forward to my bunk, to find myself shunned by all my

shipmates as if I was a leper, which treatment, as I had hitherto been a prime favourite, was very hard to bear. But in the face of ignorant superstition like this I was powerless. So I held my peace and sat solitary, my recovery being much hindered by the miserable state of my mind, The rest of the passage to Valparaiso was a time of such misery as I never experienced before or since, and I wonder that they did not land a hopeless lunatic.

"However, I fought against *that* successfully, determined to live if I was allowed to, and at last, to my intense relief, I shook off the dust of my feet against that detestable ship and her barbarous crew, thankful that their cruelty had stopped short of heaving me overboard as a sacrifice to the *manes* of my lost shipmates."

There was a silence of some minutes' duration after he had finished his yarn, then from one and the other came scraps of personalia confirming the general outlines of his experiences as to the existence of those nightmares of the sea of incredible size, as attested by the *ejecta* of every dying cachalot. All gave it as their firm belief that it must have been a sperm whale that swallowed Jonah in the long ago, but it was the general opinion that as a rule a man was perfectly safe in the water from a sperm whale except under such circumstances as had been detailed, and that our friend had been the victim of a mistake on the part of the hungry leviathan.

XXVI

THE TRAGICAL TALE OF THE BOOMERANG PIG

He was born under a baleful star. I know, because I was there at the time. But at the outset of this veracious history, to prevent probable misunderstanding, allow me to assert that what follows in all its details is literally and absolutely true. Naturally deficient in imagination, I would not attempt to embellish so curious a narrative as this, which, were I gifted beyond all literary romancists, I should only mar by adding fiction thereunto.

Well then, for the *locus in quo*, a lumbering old Yankee-built ship of some 2000 tons burden, bound from Liverpool to Bombay with coal, and at the inauspicious opening of my subject's erratic career wallowing in the storm-torn sea off the Cape of Good Hope. His mother was a middle-aged lady pig, with a bitter grievance against mankind in general, and her present owners in particular. Brought on board during the vessel's stay in Madras the previous year, she had never forgotten or ceased to lament her native jungle,

nor had the long course of gentle treatment and good food modified by a single vengeful gasp her virulent hatred of all and sundry. Insult was added to injury when, in Liverpool, she was mated with an alien spouse, the chubby pink-flushed whiteness of whose skin made no greater contrast to her inky hue than did the calm placidity of his temper to her furious, unappeasable, and continual rage. Many tokens of her regard were scored deeply along his fat sides; indeed, but for the manifest impossibility of getting a fair bite at him, it is only reasonable to suppose that she would have devoured him alive.

Now it befell upon a certain evening, when a bitter north-east gale was brewing under the lowering leaden sky, and the weird whistling of the coming tempest made melancholy music through the complaining shrouds, that an interesting event in her history drew near its fulfilment. In anticipation of this occurrence, our carpenter had rigged up a rude sort of fold under the topgallant forecastle, and within its narrow limits she was ranging tiger-like, champing her foam-flecked jaws, and occasionally tobogganing from side to side in various unhappy attitudes as the ship tumbled every way in the bewildered sea. When the watch to which I (a small urchin of fourteen) belonged came on deck at midnight I was immediately told off by my inveterate foe, the second mate, to attend to the requirements of the "lady in the straw." Inverted commas are

necessary, because the "straw" did not exist, nor any substitute for it; nothing but the bare deck polished to a glossy slipperiness by the incessant friction of the sliding sow. There was a fresh hand at the bellows before we had been on deck many minutes, and all the watch were soon perched aloft, struggling short-handedly with the acreage of thundering canvas, while the ship plunged so violently that I could only remain under the fore-castle by clinging, bat-like, to the side of the pen that confined the miserable mother-elect. During that vigil of terror and darkness (for I had only one of those ancient teapot-shaped lamps, that yield more smoking stench than light) eleven wretched parti-coloured morsels of pork came into being, the advent of each one exacerbating the feelings of the already frantic parent to such a degree that she became a veritable fury, and to my terrified eyes seemed to dilate with potentialities of destruction. Out of the whole family I succeeded, at the imminent risk of my own life, in saving two from the jaws of their maniacal mother, and one of those sagaciously succumbed before eight bells. I received small thanks for my pains, and narrowly escaped a colting at my tyrant's hands, who saw his visions of abundant sucking-pig rudely dispelled by what he was pleased to call *my* "dam' pig-headed foolishness."

It boots not now to tell of the wealth of ingenuity I lavished upon that ill-starred piglet, to whom I stood perforce *in loco parentis*—how I must needs

lasso the snorting, shrieking mother, and, having entangled her legs fore and aft, drag her to the side of the pen and lash her securely down, while I held my *protégé* to one streaming teat after another. Enough that the care of that solitary remnant of a family embittered my days and rendered my nights sleepless interregnums of weariness. Unto all things their appointed end, saith the sage, and so at last I was freed from this porcine incubus by my charge having grown able and wily enough to dodge his unnatural parent, and snatch his sustenance from her in a variety of ingenious ways. But still he might not trust himself to sleep near her, and so he discovered a nest beneath the heel of the bowsprit, whereby her insatiable desire for his destruction was completely frustrated, since she could by no possible artifice get at him. After a while it was noticed that Sûsti (as for some hidden reason he had come to be called) invariably wore at the end of his tail a crimson ornament, which, upon closer examination, was found to be where something amused itself, or themselves, by nibbling during the night. The carpenter, who is always called upon to repair everything on board ship except ropes and sails, turned to and bound up the lessening terminal with a piece of tarred canvas, and plentifully besmeared the outside of the bandage with tar also. And this he did many days, because tar, and dressing, and a little more of Sûsti had always disappeared in the morning. So the outrage continued, and the tail

became more and more abbreviated until it was entirely *non est*, and the midnight marauders had actually excavated a socket in the *corpus delicti* nearly half an inch deep.

By this time we had reached Bombay, and were busy, with the aid of a swarming host of coolies, in getting rid of our grimy cargo. But some one found time to suggest that a place of safety for Sûsti should be found during the night, fearing that, unless something was done soon, we should seek him one morning and find only a disembodied squeal. Consequently Sûsti was captured every evening, and, protesting discordantly, was confined in a coal-basket, which was carefully enclosed in the after hatch house. The plan succeeded admirably, so far that the diminution in our stock of pork ceased. But one morning, when the after hold was empty, the hatch house was lifted off as usual and placed by the side of the gaping hatchway, its door open, and Sûsti lying, forgotten, in his basket. All hands went to breakfast, while the coolies below, as was their wont, stopped work, and, squatting in the after-hold, held a conversazione. In the middle of our meal there was a hideous uproar, and an eruption of the heathen from all the hatchways, greenish-grey with fright, and swarming madly in every possible direction—overboard, aloft, anywhere. When at last we were able to elicit from the demented crowd the reason for their panic, we learned that as they were all toiling strenuously to prepare the coal for

a renewal of our operations, down into their midst came flying a demon of Jehannum in the guise of a gigantic pig, with vast bat-like wings, and eyes of the bigness of a man's fists glaring like red-hot coals. What wonder that they had fled, Hindoo and Mussulman alike, at the sight of their abomination in such an avatar of dread hurtling down upon their shaven crowns. The story sent us all seeking below, little dreaming that the luckless Sûsti was to blame. Presently we found him lying by the side of the keelson, badly hurt, but cheerful as ever. And with that indomitable pluck that had endeared him to us all, he not only survived, but made a complete recovery within a week.

Now, however, his rotund body had taken a curve, by reason of which he always appeared to be in the act of reaching around to look for the tail that had been. This peculiar bent of his figure had the strangest results whenever he took exercise. Wherever his goal might be, and in spite of his most energetic efforts to reach it, he only succeeded in describing what I am obliged to call a lateral parabola, along which he would eventually arrive at some unforeseen spot near his starting-point. Nor were the co-efficients of his curves at all regular. Sometimes, owing to the energetic efforts he made to counteract this inevitable curvilinear bias, a series of maxima and minima were produced which, when traced upon the deck, afforded some very interesting problems in the parallelograms of forces.

But I regret to record that the principal result of his errata was a decided increase in the local consumption of Scotch whisky. For our jovial skipper became so inordinately vain of his boomerang pig that he issued invitations to his fellow-captains in the harbour, in quite a reckless fashion, to come and see what an unprecedented curio he had gotten. They came multitudinously, came to scoff, but remained to grow purple with laughter and lose all their loose change in bets upon the probable points of arrival made by Sûsti in his gyratory gallops after sweet biscuits. And they returned to their several ships in a charming variety of unconventional attitudes, vocal but not harmonious, at irregular intervals during the night. Meanwhile Sûsti, pampered beyond even swinish dreams of avarice, waxed fat and almost uncontrollable. *Joie de vivre* filled him from end to end—from snout to socket. It seized him suddenly at all sorts of times, causing him to squeal hysterically, waggle his incipient hams momentarily, and then launch himself into space along the line of some marvellously complicated curve terminating in the most unexpected places.

As long as Europeans were about him he was safe, except for an occasional belabouring when he chanced to upset some luckless passer-by. But we were ordered round the coast to Cocanada in ballast, and, to expedite our loading there, took a number of coolies with us. On the day of our arrival, and shortly after anchoring, all hands were seated

peacefully at dinner on the forecastle head. Below, on the shady side of the forward house, the "bundaree" had prepared the coolies' meal, an immense flat dish of rice piled into a cone, with a number of tiny wells of curry round the rim, and a larger reservoir of the same fiery compound at the apex in a sort of crater. Around this the placid Hindoos crouched on their hams in orthodox fashion, and each right hand had just begun to manipulate a bolus of curry-moistened rice for conveyance to the expectant mouths, when with a meteoric rush Sûsti came round the corner of the house in a grand ellipse, and landed in the centre of the rice-pan. This was too much for even those mild coolies. With yells and imprecations they sprang for handspikes, belaying-pins, etc., and rushed upon the unclean beast, perfectly mad with rage. Our big retriever, who hated all black men impartially, and was therefore rigidly limited to the poop as a rule, saw the melée, and, judging doubtless that it was high time for his interference, came flying from his eminence, all shining teeth and savage snarl, into the centre of the struggling mass. For a brief moment nothing could be clearly distinguished; then suddenly there was a break up and a stampede. Every coolie sprang overboard like the demon-possessed swine of Gadara, leaving Neptune sadly sniffing at the lifeless body of Sûsti, which lay embedded in a heap of the befouled and scattered rice.

XXVII

A DAY ON THE SOLANDER WHALING-GROUND

A BRIGHT sunny morning; the gentle north-easterly breeze just keeping the sails full as the lumbering whaling-barque *Splendid* dips jerkily to the old southerly swell. Astern, the blue hills around Preservation Inlet lie shimmering in the soft spring sunlight, and on the port beam the mighty pillar of the Solander Rock, lying off the south-western extremity of New Zealand, is sharply outlined against the steel-blue sky. Far beyond that stern sentinel, the converging shores of Foveaux Strait are just discernible in dim outline through a low haze. Ahead, the jagged and formidable rocks of Stewart Island, bathed in a mellow golden glow, give no hint of their terrible appearance what time the Storm-fiend of the south-west cries havoc and urges on his chariot of war.

The keen-eyed Kanaka in the fore crow's nest shades his eyes with his hand, peering earnestly out on the weather bow at something which has

attracted his attention. A tiny plume of vapour rises from the blue hollows about ten miles away, but so faint and indefinable that it may be only a breaking wavelet's crest caught by the cross wind. Again that little bushy jet breaks the monotony of the sea; but this time there is no mistaking it. Emerging diagonally from the water, not high and thin, but low and spreading, it is an infallible indication to those piercing eyes of the presence of a sperm-whale. The watcher utters a long, low musical cry, "Blo-o-o-o-w," which penetrates the gloomy recesses of fo'ksle and cuddy, where the slumberers immediately engage in fierce conflict with whales of a size never seen by waking eyes. The officer and white seamen at the main now take up the cry, and in a few seconds all hands are swiftly yet silently preparing to leave the ship. She is put about, making a course which shortly brings her a mile or two to windward of the slowly-moving cachalot. Now it is evident that no solitary whale is in sight, but a great school, gambolling in the bright spray. One occasionally, in pure exuberance of its tremendous vitality, springs twenty feet into the clear air, and falls, a hundred tons of massive flesh, with earthquake-like commotion, back into the sea.

Having got the weather-gage, the boats are lowered; sail is immediately set, and, like swift huge-winged birds, they swoop down upon the prey. Driving right upon the back of the nearest

monster, two harpoons are plunged into his body up to the "hitches." The sheet is at once hauled aft, and the boat flies up into the wind; while the terrified cetacean vainly tries, by tremendous writhing and plunging, to rid himself of the barbed weapon. The mast is unshipped, and snugly stowed away; oars are handled, and preparation made to deliver the *coup de grâce*. But finding his efforts futile, the whale has sounded, and his reappearance must be awaited. Two boats' lines are taken out before the slackening comes, and he slowly rises again. Faster and faster the line comes in; the blue depths turn a creamy white, and it is "Stern all" for dear life. Up he comes, with jaws gaping twenty feet wide, gleaming teeth and livid, cavernous throat glittering in the brilliant light. But the boat's crew are seasoned hands, to whom this dread sight is familiar, and orders are quietly obeyed, the boat backing, circling and darting ahead like a sentient thing under their united efforts. So the infuriated mammal is baffled and dodged, while thrust after thrust of the long lances are got home, and streamlets of blood trickling over the edges of his spout-hole give warning that the end is near. A few wild circlings at tremendous speed, jaws clashing and blood foaming in torrents from the spiracle, one mighty leap into the air, and the ocean monarch is dead. He lies just awash, gently undulated by the long, low swell, one pectoral fin slowly waving like some great stray

leaf of *Fucus gigantea*. A hole is cut through the fluke and the line secured to it. The ship, which has been working to windward during the conflict, runs down and receives the line; and in a short time the great inert mass is hauled alongside and secured by the fluke chain.

The other two boats have succeeded in killing a large fish also, but are at least four miles off. They may as well try to move the Solander itself as tow their unwieldy prize to the ship. The shapeless bulk of the cachalot makes it a difficult tow at all times, but, with a rising wind and sea, utterly impossible to whale-boats. The barometer is falling; great masses of purple-edged cumuli are piling high on the southern horizon, and no weather prophet is needed to foretell the imminent approach of a heavy gale. The captain looks wistfully to windward at Preservation Inlet, only twenty-five miles off, and thinks, with fierce discontent, of the prize, worth eight or nine hundred pounds, which lies but four or five miles away, and must be abandoned solely for want of steam-power. And that is not all. Around, far as the eye can reach, the bushy spouts are rising. Hundreds of gigantic cetaceans are disporting, apparently not at all "gallied" by the conflict which has been going on. Some are near enough to the fast boat to be touched by hand. "Potentialities of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice" are here; but acquisition is impossible for want of steam. The vessel, bound to that immense body, can only

crawl tortoise-like before the wind—lucky, indeed, to have a harbour ahead where the whale may be cut in, even though it be forty miles away. Without that refuge available, she could not hope to keep the sea and hold her prize through the wild weather, now so near. So, with a heavy heart, the captain orders the fast boat to abandon her whale and return with all possible speed. The breeze is freshening fast, and all sail is made for Port William. So slow is the progress, that it is past midnight before that snug shelter is reached, although for the last four hours the old ship is terribly tried and strained by the press of sail carried to such a gale.

In four days the work of getting the oil is finished, and three or four Maoris ashore have made a tun and a half of good clear oil from the abandoned carcass. This, added to the ship's quantity, makes twelve and a half tuns of oil and spermaceti mingled from the one fish. None smaller has been noticed out of the hundreds seen on the same day. It is eighteen days from the time of anchoring before the harbour can again be quitted, owing to adverse winds and gales. Who can estimate the number of opportunities lost in that time? On the second day after reaching the grounds, another school is seen with the same result—one fish, and another fortnight's enforced idleness.

This is no imaginary sketch, but a faithful record of actual facts, which, with slight variations,

has been repeated many times within the writer's experience. On one occasion there were four of us on the ground in company—three Americans, and one colonial. Each secured a whale before dusk. We kept away at once for Port William, fearing the shifting of the wind, which would bring us on a ragged, lee shore. The Americans, being strangers to the coast, hauled off to the westward. Five days afterwards, as we were cleaning ship after trying out, those three ships came creeping in to the harbour through the eastern end of Foveaux Strait, all sadly damaged, and of course whaleless. They had been battered by the furious gale all that time, and barely escaped destruction on the Snares. Two of them left the grounds a few days after, having had their fill of the Solander. Thus, it is obvious that nothing but steam is needed to make this most prolific of whaling-grounds a veritable treasure-field. Cutting in and trying out at sea could be entirely dispensed with. The magnificent land-locked harbour of Preservation Inlet, to say nothing of others easily available, affords complete facilities for a shore station. The water is in many cases forty or fifty fathoms deep alongside the rocks, while sheltered nooks abound, "where never wind blows loudly."

Working by the share, no finer or more skilful whalemen exist than the half-breed Maoris who people Stewart Island, and they would joyfully welcome such a grand opportunity of making their pile.

Long before the Antarctic Expedition from Dundee left our shores, the merits of this grand field for whaling operations were discussed at length by the writer in the columns of a Dundee paper, and strongly advocated ; but those responsible for the management of that venture were evidently so wedded to Greenland methods that the advice was unheeded. Perhaps the unprofitable issue of the enterprise as far as whales were concerned may dispose the adventurers to take advice, and try sperm-whaling in the temperate zone, in place of right-whaling in the far south. Should they do so, there is every reason to hope and believe that the palmy days of the sperm-whale fishery may be renewed. Dundee firms of to-day may then, like Messrs. Enderby of London in 1820-30, gladly welcome home ship after ship, full to the hatches with the valuable spoil of the Southern Seas.

Note.—Since the above was written it has been the writer's melancholy duty to chronicle the final disappearance of the British Whale Fishery.

XXVIII

SEA-ELEPHANTS AT HOME

JUDGING by the popularity of the seals at the Zoological Gardens, these wonderful amphibia have a firm hold upon the affections of ordinary people. It probably occurs to but few as they gaze delightedly upon the unapproachable grace of the seals in their favourite element, how brutal and debasing is the pursuit of them for commercial purposes. This is a theme that has exercised the powers of many able writers, but has probably never been set forth in such awful realism as Mr. Burn-Murdoch has presented us with in his book, *From Edinburgh to the Antarctic.* For the seal is such a gentle, kindly creature, so perfectly harmless, except perhaps during the courting season, when the males fight fiercely, but never *à l'outrance.* The seal's one mistake in life is that he has not exerted the intelligence that he undoubtedly possesses in the direction of clothing himself with some substitute, worthless to man, for the inimitable covering which is so ardently craved by shivering man and womankind.

There are, however, some seals that, from their bulk and ferocious appearance, actually invite attack from those ardent sportsmen who only long for sight of game worthy of hunting. The sea-elephant (*Macrorhinus proboscideus*), upon first acquaintance, seems, as our transatlantic friends concisely express it, "to fill the bill" in these respects. In size he is little inferior to the huge quadruped after which he has been named, although, owing to the absence of legs, he will not look so bulky as the elephant. The possession of a rudimentary trunk of a foot or so in length has probably had little to do with the trivial appellation given to this great Phoca, his enormous size as compared with the ordinary seal being warrant enough for the name. Since the sea-elephant's hide is almost hairless, only the massive coating of blubber he carries can excite the cupidity of the hunter, and then only in the absence of anything that may be easier obtained.

During the course of a whaling voyage "down South" it was the writer's misfortune to visit the Auckland Islands in search of sea-elephants, owing to the unaccountable absence of whales from the vicinity for an extraordinarily long time. No one of the ship's company had ever seen one of the creatures before, although most were well acquainted with ordinary seal-hunting. When, therefore, it was decided to visit the lonely, storm-tormented isles usually frequented by them there was an utter absence of enthusiasm. Indeed,

many openly expressed a strong desire to be well out of the business. But when once a course has been decided upon at sea it needs stronger measures and greater unanimity among the crew than is often possessed to alter it, and consequently, after a truly miserable time of contention with the inhospitality of the Southern Ocean, we found ourselves anchored in a fairly well-sheltered bay at the Aucklands. The time of our visit was the antipodean spring, a season which, in those latitudes, is rigorous beyond belief. Gales of wind, accompanied by hard snowflakes and hail, raged almost incessantly, enwrapping the entire land surface in a bleak haze of spray from the sea, mingled with the congealed moisture from above. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the object of the expedition had to be pursued without delay, parties were landed, armed with clubs of iron-wood, short but massive, and long, keen knives. General instructions were given as to procedure, based upon insufficient data, as the recipients well knew, and therefore not at all reliable. Everybody understood in a hazy sort of way that a seal's vulnerable point was his nose: a tap on that was as paralysing as a bullet through the heart. Of course. And the subsequent proceedings were merely a matter of practice and stamina. *Very* good—oh, very good indeed! Thus equipped the explorers went blundering over boulders, wading through morasses, over fallen tree-trunks and glassy ice-slopes, until suddenly

through the mist loomed up a massy shape. Possibly it was exaggerated by the haze, but it looked truly terrific when it was seen to be alive. It was surprising how little any one coveted the honour of being first to attack the big seal in front of them. But for very shame's sake there could be no halting on the sealers' part.

An appalling roar, quite in keeping with his appearance, burst from the monster, at which a most sympathetic thrill ran through the attacking party, accompanied by an earnest desire to be somewhere else. Again that indefinite desire to stand well in each other's opinion came to their rescue, impelling the foremost man to fling his fears to the winds and rush in upon the formidable beast crouching before him. A badly-aimed blow at the animal's snout made no more impression than a snow-flake, but the unwieldy creature, thoroughly alarmed, dropped from his semi-rampant altitude, almost burying his daring assailant beneath him as he did so. Then, like some legless hippopotamus, he waddled seawards, rolling from side to side in a manner so utterly ludicrous that fear was totally quenched in an uproarious burst of laughter. Recovering from that revulsionary paroxysm, all hands rushed upon the retreating mass, each eager to be the first to attack what we now saw to be a thoroughly demoralised foe.

Out of the many harmless blows aimed at the great seal's head one struck the root of his

proboscis, and like some vast bladder suddenly deflated he sank to the ground. Into the subsequent details it is not edifying to enter, their crude brutality being only excusable on the ground of nervous ignorance. But as foolhardiness succeeded timorousness, so did tragedy wait upon comedy. Out of the mist-enwrapped morass to shoreward of us came in elephantine haste a perfect host of the huge creatures we were seeking. And, as if they could not see us or were so terror-stricken that nothing could hinder them in their extraordinary career seawards, they came floundering, bellowing right amongst our little party. For one short minute it seemed as if we should be overwhelmed, crushed under this mountainous charge of massive flesh. Then there was "sauve qui peut." In various directions we fled from the path of the advancing hosts, but hung upon their flanks, getting a straggler now and then. The chase grew frantic, "thorough bog, thorough briar," over rocks and through streams; panting with fierce desire to slay, and forgetful of all else. What a crowd of savages we were!

At the last moment, on the very edge of the beach, one of our number, anxious to get just another victim, missed his blow, and stumbled right upon the huge beast. Putting out his arms to save himself, he thrust one of them right into the mouth of the gaping behemoth. An ear-splitting yell of agony followed, bringing every man to his assistance on the gallop. At first it was difficult to see what

had happened, the great bulk of the seal as it swayed from side to side effectually hiding the puny form of the suffering enemy by its side. He, poor wretch, was in evil case; for the sea-elephant has the alarming habit of crushing solid pebbles of basalt or granite as large as oranges between his jaws in much the same fashion as a healthy youngster does lollypops. Probably this strange exercise of the gigantic jaw power he possesses is rendered necessary for digestive purposes, since no seal masticates its food.

Poor Sandy, who in such headlong fashion had thrust his arm into that awful mill, now found to his bitter cost what use might be made of the generally harmless stonebreakers. After the first blood-curdling scream we had heard there was an utter silence as far as our shipmate was concerned, only the soft floundering of the immense mass of sliding flesh and the snorting breath being audible. The mate was the first to realise what had happened, and with a howl of anger he leaped forward, bringing down his club with all his might just as the creature stooped low for another launching movement seaward. The blow fell just at the junction of the proboscis with the skull, and with a shudder which convulsed the whole mass of his body the huge animal collapsed, burying our unhappy shipmate beneath him. With one impulse we all sprang upon the heap of flesh, tearing with desperate energy to roll it from off the body, but it really seemed at first impossible to move it.

Slipping, sliding, gasping for breath, we all pushed and strove—wasting, I doubt not, more than half our strength for want of preconcerted action. Oh, joy; we moved him at last, and there lay Sandy to all appearance a corpse.

Without any further delay we placed him in the boat, hoping that he was still alive, but by no means sure, and with all possible speed he was taken on board. This sudden calamity seemed to paralyse the rest of us for the time, and we all stood about watching the departing boat, as if we could not make up our minds to resume operations. But suddenly a dull, thunderous roar startled us from our lethargy, and looking landwards through the driving sleet we saw the shapeless forms of another immense herd of the ungainly monsters floundering toward us. Manifestly we were in an unhealthy predicament, and without waiting for orders we fled in all directions but towards the advancing herd. Through swampy patches of green, over frozen rocks, torn by thorny shrubs, and incessantly dodging the blind onset of groups of the wallowing monsters, we scrambled unreasoningly until—panting, breathless, and demoralised—we halted from sheer inability to go farther. When we had recovered it was some time before we got together again, and when we did we were a sorry crowd, as unfit as could well be imagined for the tremendous labour that awaited us of skinning the huge carcasses that lay dotted about the foreshore. However, we commenced the task,

and by nightfall had completed the flenching. A gun from the ship recalled us on board almost too weary to launch the boats, and plastered thickly with mud, blood, and grease. When we arrived on board we were too exhausted to eat, hardly able to feel any interest in the news that Sandy was alive and doing as well as could be expected. But one conviction was burnt deep into the perceptions of all—that the hardest whaling ever done was a pleasant pastime compared with sea-elephant hunting at the Aucklands.

XXIX

AN INTERVIEW

Difficulties, which, could I have foreseen then, would have appeared insurmountable, attended the interview hereinafter recorded. First of all, His Majesty King Cachalot the MMCC was not in the best of humours—which was hardly to be wondered at, since, with all the ability we could muster, five boats' crews of us from the spouter *Finback* had been harassing him since daylight, eager to add his fourteen-ton overcoat to our greasy cargo. It was a blazing day on the Line, Pacific side, with hardly a ripple on the water, so that what advantage there was weighed on our side. Yet so wary and skilful had his Majesty proved, that one by one the boats had retired hurt from the field, while the object of their attentions was as fresh as paint, and, as he afterwards expressed it, "going very strong." Nevertheless the scrum had been warm in a double sense, and his Majesty bore many palpable evidences of our efforts all over his huge black body.

Being in command of the only surviving boat,

sole representative of our available force, and with a reputation yet to win, I must confess to a little lack of care, a nervous desire to distinguish myself; but I still think it was hard to have my boat knocked into a litter of barrel staves by the unanticipated somersault of my expected prize just as I reckoned upon delivering a *coup de lance* in final settlement of our little account.

After the surprise of our meeting had somewhat subsided, I found myself reclining in a richly carved and upholstered chair in my genial host's splendidly furnished reception room, puffing with appreciative enjoyment at one of his unapproachable Rothschilds—'beg pardon I'm sure—I mean that I found myself clinging with no uncertain clutch to a capsized line-tub, into which I succeeded in getting after a series of involuntary evolutions, after having managed to swallow the majority of a barrel of salt water. While settling myself in my ark like a faded Moses, our late antagonist drew near and watched me closely. As soon as I appeared to be *compos mentis*, he thus addressed me:

"What you settin' there fur a-gappin' at *me* 'sif y'didn't know who I wuz."

"I humbly beg your Majesty's pardon; I meant no offence, I assure you. But I perceive you are an American citizen."

"Perseev' nothin', y'abbrevyated galoot," growled he. "Hain't enny persepshun 'baout ye,

'r y'ewd see I'm waitin' ter be interviewed, same's all th' other sellebritiz."

Now, although I *do* believe that the journalist is *nascitur, non fit*, my nascent journalism if existent was decidedly latent, and at present I was indubitably unfit for anything but a rescue or two. But here was a unique chance of becoming famous, and though modest and retiring to the last degree, I rose to the occasion. A few fragmentary recollections marshalled themselves, and I asked insinuatingly :

"How old is your Majesty ?"

"One thousan' four hunderd seasons," he replied promptly.

As soon as I recovered my breath, I answered politely, "Indeed ! Your Majesty wears well. I should hardly have thought it. Are your Majesty's parents living ?"

"How'd I know," he grumbled, peeping fiercely at me out of the corner of his starboard eye. "Don't go much on parients ermong our peepul. Next please !"

"Where did your venerability do us the honour to be born, if the question be allowable ?" I queried timidly.

"Here," he roared, with a resounding crash of his enormous tail on the surface ; "where'd ye think I'd be born but at sea ?"

Deficient in locality evidently, I thought, being a bit of a phrenologist myself, though it would have required a theodolite to survey the bumps

upon *his* capacious cranium. But as he showed signs of irritability, I added quickly, "Are you married, your Majesty, or how?"

"Well; I should cackle," he said—"married, hay! Why one of your (an awful reverberation suggested a powerful adjective) slush-tubs hez jest broke up one uv the purtiest little harems I ever collected, twelve ravishin' beauties sech ez any monark'd be proud of. Well thar, hurry up; I'm jest reminded ov an ole schoolmate uv mine 's got mose 's good erwun. He's usin' roun' the Bonins 'baout now, 'n' I mus' git over thar 'n' b'reave him. Royal rights, y'know," and his Majesty shed a ponderous wink.

"What does your Majesty do for a living?" I ventured to inquire.

"Eat!" he roared. "Harpoons en bomb-guns, what dz ennybody du fr a livin'? *I* never heerd sech a barnacle-headed grampus 'n all my fishin'." With that he lifted up his tremendous caput out of water and exposed his Blackwall tunnel of a mouth, as who should remark, "Not much room for other occupation in a whale's life when a gulf like this needs attention."

I suppose I looked a bit preoccupied, for he hastily added, "But I never eat sech insecks ez you be."

"What, never?" I ventured to murmur.

"No, never," he replied; "at least, that is,"—but seeing his hesitation, I said I fancied I'd heard a story about a passenger by the name of Jonah down on the Syrian coast a while back. "Oh, well

y'know," he muttered apologetically, " 'f course accidents will happen, 's the shark said to his brother when he took him in, but I don't reckon thar wuz anythin' to mek a noise erbout. 'Tany-rate the can'date left considerable sudden. Yew needn't be 'fraid ennyhow."

But I was unprepared with any more questions at the moment, the outlook, or inlook rather, being so disconcerting. So I said, "Would your Majesty object to outlining a few of your wonderful experiences for the benefit of landsmen generally. Any information you may choose to give will be regarded as strictly confidential, of course."

"Oh, sartinly," he replied with an alarming area of smile. "Mos' ov 'em hev ben with your dod-gasted tribe. Why yew're tarnally prowlin' erbout tryin' ter get ter wind'ard ov peac'ble fokes I kaint surmise. Still, up till now I've ben equal ter holdin' me own,—keepin' me eend up, ez yew may say. To-day f'rinstance, hey?" I winced under the sarcasm. "But I mind onst daown on the Noo Seelan' coas' towin' five boat-load ov Mowries frum the Solander 'way down eenamost ter the Cambells. They wuz a plucky crowd, f'r they helt on ter me through a blizzard ov hail an' snow lasting twyst az long as I kin stay soundin'. When it gin over they wuz all fruz stiffer'n a lance-pole. My, but gettin' cleer ov em wuz a pull. I hed to soun' at top-gait 'sif I wuz boun' f'r two thousan' fathoms, 'n' suthin' hed ter give. I wuz pretty fat in those days, so their all-fired

irons drew. They galled me like sixty, but I was free.

"Then a left-handed-on-both-feet crowd eout ov a French right-whaler tackled me offn the Cape. Mighty big mistake *they* struck—thought I wuz pore ole say-nothin'-ter-nobody Mr. Cetus, they did. 'N', when I milled roun' 'n' cum f'r 'em eend on 'ith er twenty foot smile on me hed! airthqueeks 'n' volcanose! y' sh'd jest er seen 'em flew. Didn' wait to say howdy, jest cut line 'n' vamoosed like 'sif ole Jemmy Smallback wuz after 'em. I wuz thet mad, I'd liketer hev busted up their ole hooker 'n' all, but thet thar *Essex* affair gin me sech er swell'd hed I 'lowed it warn't bad reck'nin' ter let her go et that.

"Say, djever see er big squid, big's me?" he queried sharply.

"Yes, your Majesty, I did once. Only once. B-b-b-ay of B-b-bengal," for I was almost moribund.

"Ah, you *hev* seen suthin' then. F'r yew insecks wut live on top don't offen git a chance ter see them critters 'less we bring 'em up f'r the sun ter see haow gaul-darned ugly they air. Wall, one like yew say yew seen tangled erp my fav'rit' wife off Futuna one afternoon. Me an' my harem wuz feedin' at 'bout a thousan' fathom, an' Polly jest sidled up ter ole Jellybelly 'n' got hole ov a mouthful ov him. He, bein' kinder s'prised, gripped her all over ter onst; 'n', stranger," he added impressively, "I'll be weather-bound ef he didn't frap her hole head up so's she couldn't bite

er breathe. We'd ben down 'bout long ernough too, but I sailed right in 'n' bit his great carkiss in half az well az I c'd see f'r his ink-cloud. Hows'ever I wuz too late, f'r he'd locked his tangle ov arms roun' an' roun' her hed, 'n' though his body wuz all chawed erp they couldn' come adrift. So she drowned, 'n we all hed ter make tracks upstairs quicker 'n winkin' er we sh'd a ben drowned tu. As 'twuz we wuz fair beat out when we arrove up top.

"Did I ever have enny fights with me own people? Well I—but there, how'd yew know, poor thing. Millyuns ov 'em. Look at me," and he swept proudly past exhibiting his grooved and ribbed flanks bearing indelible traces of many a furious battle, some of the foot-wide scars being twenty feet long.

"Enny more informashun I c'n supply yew with at short notice? bekuz this session'll hev ter adjurn *siny die* in about tew minnits. I'm gittin' mos' amazin' peckish."

Happy thought, "What do you live on mostly, your Majesty?"

"Squid. Fust 'n las' 'n' between meals gen'ly. They aint nothin' better tew eat in the hull worl' 'z far's I know. We dew 'casionally git a bellyful ov fish ov sorts by layin' quiet when the shoals air swarmin'. They run down a feller's gullet in hunderds 'n never know whar they're goin. But they're cussid indigestible——"

I was alone. There was nothing in sight, but

my interviewee was gone. So stiff and sore was I that I could hardly turn my head to see if help was coming. There was no help in sight that I could discover, but presently a boat came along from the ship and picked me up—none too soon. Gloomily we returned on board to moralise mournfully over our ill-luck and the perfidy of sperm whales generally.

XXX

UP A WATERSPOUT

Of course no one is under any obligation to believe this most reliable relation. At the same time I may be allowed to remind the sceptical that in the present case their credibility is subjected to no such strain as half the respectable advertisements of the day place upon it. However, I won't press the point; here is the story, *fay ce que vouldras.*

Doubtless you have all heard of waterspouts, many of you have seen them in full spin, and not a few, amateurs of meteorology, have got their pet theories as to the genesis, evolution, and dissolution of these mysterious meteors. With just a touch of perhaps pardonable vanity I may say that, for an important section of society, my theory holds the field—is, in fact, unassailable. But I refrain from exposing it publicly at present, principally because such exposition involves a large use of the higher mathematics, in which I am, to be candid, somewhat shaky; and secondly, because the editor would see me farther before he would

let me do it. But an ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory, even such gilt-edged theory as mine—at least most of us work on the lines of this well-worn proverb. So my experience, which is herein set forth, must necessarily be considered as the most valuable contribution to our knowledge of waterspoutery or trombe-oonery that has ever yet appeared. I might claim more for it than this, but modesty was ever a failing of mine.

On 23rd August last, then, I was leaning over the taffrail of an ancient barque, of which I was "only" mate, homeward bound from Iquique to Falmouth for orders. We had reached the horse latitudes, those detestable regions embracing the debatable area between the limits of the north-east and south-east trade winds. Here you may have such an exhibition of what the skies are capable of in the matter of rain as nowhere else in the world. For days together the weather will consist of squalls—not much wind in them as a rule—from all points of the compass, but rain — well, one might almost as well be living beneath an ocean of which the bottom is given to falling out occasionally. And as all this tremendous rainfall comes from the sea, the replenishment of the supply upstairs keeps the pumping machinery going constantly. It is no uncommon sight to see forty or fifty waterspouts in various stages of their career at one time. On this particular afternoon there was quite a forest of them about, but as yet none of them had come within less than

two or three miles of the ship. It was my watch below, and the air being stifling down in the murky little cabin, I was enjoying a pipe and a little cool breeze that had been blowing for about twenty minutes in the right direction. The old hooker was wriggling along about two or three knots — sufficiently fast to induce me to try whether some members of a sociable school of dolphins that were playing about us could be gulled into biting at a bit of white rag I was trailing, which concealed a formidable hook. The "old man" was below, seated at the cabin table, wrestling with his day's reckoning not over-successfully, for his grumbling expletives were now and then audible through the wide-open skylight, the man at the wheel gazing skyward with a comical expression of innocence whenever he met my eye after an extra heavy blast from below. The antics of the fish beneath me so fully occupied my attention that the near approach of a waterspout along the starboard beam did not attract my notice. In any case, the weather was no affair of mine, the bo'sun being in charge, though, as usual in these undermanned vessels, up to his elbows in tar, away forward somewhere. But suddenly the gloom became so heavy and the chill in the air so evident, that I looked up wondering whence the squall had arrived at such short notice. At that moment a big dolphin who had been tantalising me for a long time seized my hook. I had only two or three fathoms of line

out, and being balanced upon the taffrail, the jerk was sufficiently forceful to make me turn a back somersault overboard. The last thing I saw was the helmsman's face blank with utter amazement at my sudden exit. I struck the water end-on, going pretty deep, but on returning to the surface was horrified to find myself the centre of a whirling, seething commotion, as if some unseen giant was stirring the sea with a mighty spoon. The gyrations I was compelled to perform made me quite giddy and sick, although my head kept so well above water that I was in no danger of drowning. Faster and faster yet I was whirled around, while a dense fog seemed to rise all round, shutting out everything from view behind an impenetrable white curtain.

I have often noticed that if you tuck a chicken's head under its wing and give it a gentle circular motion it will "stay put" in any position you like for an indefinite length of time, although the brightness of its eyes and its regular respiration shows that it is "all there." Thus it was with me. I was certainly all there, but the spinning business had reduced me to a hypnotised or mesmerised condition, in which I was incapable of independent volition, while keenly conscious of all that was going on. I became aware of an upward movement, a sort of spiral ascension, as if I was attached to one of the threads of a gigantic vertical screw that was being withdrawn by a steady left-handed revolution. Also, it was very wet,

though not with a solid wetness as of the sea—more like one of the usual tremendous showers we had lately been having, and in no sense was I conscious of floating. I began to get somewhat used to the spiral movement, the sensation being almost pleasant, since the nausea that troubled me was gone, but I wondered vaguely whither I was bound. It was getting very cold, and a muffled persistent roar, as of some infuriated bull uttering his grievances through a vast speaking-trumpet, worried me greatly, for I could imagine no reason for such a sound. However, in my passive condition I could only endure whatever came along, this being no time for protest or struggle.

Suddenly I felt myself emerge as if from a pipe up into an immense reservoir of the heaviest mist I ever felt. At that instant a terrible sensation of instability took possession of me, very like that one experiences in wandering over deep new-fallen snow, concealing Heaven knows what crevasses beneath, only more so. My heart worked like a pulsometer, and every nerve in my quivering corpus said as plain as print, "You'll come an awful cropper directly." And it was even so. All my lost power of independent movement came back to me at once, and frantically clutching at the fog wreaths around me I began to fall. Most of us know that ugly old dream where the bed plays see-saw over some unfathomable abyss, higher at every swing, till suddenly we wake snatching at the bed-clothes and bathed in sweat. In

my case, unfortunately, the fall came too. It seemed to occupy hours. While I came hurtling from the heavens I remembered with satisfaction that the wife would get her half-pay right up to the end of the voyage, and I fervently hoped she had kept my insurance premiums paid up. Then the great solemn sea sprang up to meet me. There was a Number One splash, a rush of salt water in my ears, and the blessed daylight once more. Right close to me was the ship, all hands gaping over the side at me as if I was a spook and never a one offering to heave me a line. The manner of my reappearance seemed to have knocked them all silly. All except the old man, that is. He stooped deliberately, picked up the coil of the main topsail brace, and hove it at me. It fell all about me in a tangle, but I managed to get hold of the standing part, which I froze to tight, while the skipper hauled me alongside. Feeling numb and stupid, I yet managed to haul myself on board, and with all the chaps gaping at me with protruding eyes, staggered up on to the poop. The skipper met me with a scowl, saying grimly, "Looky here, Mr. Brown, the next time you quit this ship, with my leave or without, you'll stay there." I felt hurt, but disinclined to talk back, so I went below to change my dunnage and enter up my log-book.

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